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THE LIFE OF
ANNE CATHARINE EMMERICH.

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THE LIFE OF
ANNE CATHARINE EMMERICH.

BY

HELEN RAM.



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1874.

P R E F A C E .

[BY THE EDITOR.]

THE following work claims to be nothing more than a narrative, condensed from the large work of Father Schmœger, of the life of the saintly woman whose name is so well known among us by her *Contemplations on the Passion of our Lord*. To anyone acquainted with Father Schmœger's volumes it is needless to point out how very large a portion of their contents has necessarily been omitted, in order to reduce the present work to its actual proportions. But I hope that nothing really material to the life and character of Anne Catharine Emmerich has been passed by : the very long passages in which Father Schmœger has given the details of so many of her visions not being altogether essential in a simple narrative like the present.

It was my intention to have inserted, at some considerable length, specimens of those "Contemplations" of Anne Catharine which are least well known to English-speaking Catholics, especially the contemplations which relate to the active life of our Blessed Lord. These already exist in two several translations in French, but have not hitherto, as far as I am aware, been given in our own language. I found that it would have been difficult

to bring the selections within reasonable compass, unless all idea of going over the whole of our Lord's preaching, however cursorily, had been abandoned, and I have therefore thought better to reserve these translations for a separate publication, which I hope may soon appear as a supplement to the present volume. This being the case, it is also natural to defer till the same opportunity some prefatory remarks on the general subject of the visions or contemplations of Anne Catharine which were intended to accompany the translations just mentioned.

In truth, the Life of Anne Catharine is a complete study and picture in itself. She might have had her mission of suffering and expiation at a time which in so many respects resembled our own,—she might have been the holy peasant child, the misunderstood and persecuted nun, the Religious driven back to the world by the tyrannical suppression of her convent, the ecstatic and stigmatized representative of the Passion of our Blessed Lord in days of unbelief and chastisement, without having also the other gift and the other vocation which were bestowed on her—the gift of marvellous and almost perpetual insight into spiritual truths in the form of visions representing the life of our Lord and of the Church, and the vocation of reviving the faith and rekindling the love of so many by the communication of what she saw and heard. These latter gifts, indeed, are not usually and regularly, in the order of God's Providence, imparted to souls less highly enriched than Anne Catharine with the solid treasures of sanctity ; but not all who are as holy as she was

have shared the special privileges of which we speak. It is, therefore, quite lawful to separate, in a slight sketch like the present, the Life of Anne Catharine from the relation of her marvellous visions, and to use the former as a sort of introduction to the latter.

It need hardly be added that nothing in the present volume relating to the more marvellous side of the life and actions of Anne Catharine is put forward as resting upon more than simply human authority. I have understood that great veneration for her exists in Germany, and it could hardly be otherwise in the neighbourhood where many must still be living who have seen and conversed with her, and felt the blessing of heaven fall on them in answer to her prayers. The records, also, of her contemplations must have made her name well known over the whole Catholic world, and few can have read them devoutly without finding themselves drawn more near to our Blessed Lord in consequence. But I have heard of no measures taken to ensure her enrolment among the saints of the Church, and we are thus destitute even of the guidance and security which an ecclesiastical process might have given us as to her virtues, or as to the graces bestowed on her or on others by her means.

H. J. C.

LONDON, *Octave of Corpus Christi*, 1874.

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CHAPTER I.

Birth and Infancy of Anne Catharine.

ON the 8th of September, 1774, a little procession wended its way to the parish church of Coesfeld, an obscure village in Westphalia. It consisted of a few poor peasants, bearing a scantily clad infant in their arms, which babe, puny, frail, and delicate as she appeared, was destined to show forth in her subsequent life how wonderful are the ways of God with His servants, Who chooses the weak things of this world to confound the strong, and Who, in the person of this humble peasant child, raised up an instrument of help for His Church in an hour of sorest need and darkness.

When the name of Anne Catharine, daughter of Bernhard and Anna Emmerich, had been duly inscribed in the baptismal register, the little company retraced their steps to Flamske, the hamlet in which the Emmerich family dwelt. Their home consisted of a low tumble-down hovel built of wood and mud, and roofed over with old moss-grown thatch, whilst all the interior it could boast of was one square apartment divided into partitions by thin strips of board, in which men and animals lived peacefully together, the straw and fodder of the latter serving as bedding for the former. Near the door, a small space roughly floored with beaten-down mud formed the common living-room, one corner of which was occupied by a fire-place of the most primitive description, possessing naught by way of cooking apparatus save a

large nail affixed to an iron plate in the wall, whence hung an enormous kettle. Chimney there was none, and therefore the smoke was free to find egress where it could, or, as usually happened, to cling about the beams and rafters and the great hanks of wool and flax suspended thence, in a dense, blinding cloud. Round the hearth stood a few old rickety chairs, a table, a spinning-wheel, piles of hay and straw, and some kitchen utensils, all blackened and saturated with the smoke. In this dark, murky hole, where the light of heaven never penetrated, and of which the sole ornament was a tattered, dingy picture of the Blessed Mother of God, a pure, refined, and gifted being was born and reared ; here she lived and grew in innocence and holiness of thought, word, and deed !

As we contemplate this infancy amidst such surroundings, are not our thoughts irresistibly carried back to another lowly birth-place, where, in company with beasts, enveloped in darkness and obscurity, a Child was born, and laid upon straw by the hands of His Mother ? This parallel with her Lord the new-born child was destined to work out to the end, living, suffering, and dying as He lived, suffered, and died, for the welfare of His Church and the salvation of souls.

The interior of the Emmerich household, as we have described it, might be taken as an average picture of ordinary Westphalian peasant-life at that period. The people were for the most part simple, industrious, hospitable and pious ; instances of quarrelling, scandal-mongering, or breaches of morality were almost unknown amongst them. Anne Catharine's parents were no exception to the rule, and their daily life, in its cheerful, contented, submission to God's Will amidst all the hardships of extreme poverty, in its fervent piety and conscientious fulfilment of all the duties of a lowly position—

a life, in fact, modelled upon the precepts of the Gospel—was of all others the one most calculated to prepare her for the steep and rugged path she was hereafter to tread. Thus her cottage home was, in very truth, a school of godliness for Anne Catharine, and in later years she used often to express her heartfelt gratitude for the training she received from those good parents.

A faithful idea of the worthy couple, and the kind of education they gave to their little daughter, may best be gleaned from her own words.

“My father,” she says, “was a devout and upright man, outwardly grave and reserved, but of a bright, sanguine disposition. He had to toil hard, for poverty often pressed him sorely, but he was naturally industrious and never greedy of gain. With child-like confidence he left all in God’s hands, and did his hard work bravely, as a good servant should. His conversation was ever full of beautiful thoughts and pious maxims, expressed in the simple language of a child. He it was who first taught me to pray, and then taking me on his knee, and doubling up my little fingers in his own, he would show me how to make both the great and the small sign of the Cross. I remember that the first words I spoke distinctly were the ‘Our Father,’ which he had taught me before I was a year old. My father was very strict about having us all brought up to work, and, when quite a tiny child, I had to fetch the horse up from the paddock by break of day, summer and winter. This animal was a vicious beast, who used to kick and bite, and was often more than my father himself could manage. With me, however, he was always gentle, would let me catch him at once, and sometimes even come trotting to meet me, when, leading him to a big stone, I used to climb up upon his back, and ride him home. If he ever turned his head and made a snatch at my foot, I gave him a slap on the nose, and he

then jogged along quite quietly. I had also to feed and rub him down, and to this day I cannot imagine how, a mere baby as I was then, I could manage him so well.

“Sometimes my father would take me out to the field with him of a morning, and when the sun rose, he never failed to take off his cap, kneel down, and thank God for giving us the beautiful sun. He would say what a detestable habit he thought it was for people to lie so long a-bed that the sun shone in upon them as they slept, and that such a habit was the origin of the ruin of many a house, country, and people. Once I recollect answering that that could not apply to me, since the rays of the sun never reached my bed. He, however, corrected me, saying that whether I could see it or not, the sun was shining all the same and could see me, and knew all that I was doing ; which made me think a great deal, and ever after I took great care to be up betimes. Other days, when we were out early together, he would draw my attention to the fresh dew on the grass, saying : ‘ Look at this dew : it is quite fresh, and untrodden by the foot of man ! We are the first to touch it, and if you pray very devoutly you will draw down a blessing upon the land. It is so beautiful a thing to walk through the fresh sparkling dew, just as it is, with heaven’s blessing on it, before a sin has been committed or one bad word spoken in the fields. When men begin to stir and the dew is all trodden down, it seems always to me as if all things were bedimmed and sullied together ! ’ Often, too, when I was helping him in the field, leading the horse, or searching for the eggs, he would lay his hand on my head and say : ‘ Stop a minute and look round : all is so fair and beautiful. Over there we can see right into Coesfeld, and worship our God hidden in the little Tabernacle in the church ! He can see us all the time, and will give His blessing upon our work.’ If we heard the sound of the

bell ringing before Mass, he used to take off his cap, and say that though we were at work we would follow the whole of the Mass, bidding me kneel down and bless myself when the priest would be saying the *Gloria* or the *Sanctus*, or else to join him in singing a hymn. In every little event that happened he traced the hand of God, and directed my thoughts to Him."

As to her mother, Anne Catharine was never weary of relating anecdotes of her piety, refinement of feeling, and tenderness to her children. Although Anna Emmerich was, to outward appearances, a stern and somewhat forbidding woman, on account of the hard work and anxiety inseparable from the bringing up of a family of nine children upon the barest means of subsistence, she had a large, warm heart, overflowing with charity and kindness towards all, and heavy as might be her own burthen, she ever strove to remove, or at any rate to lighten, those of others. Never a word of discontent was heard to pass her lips, and so thoroughly was she filled with the spirit of prayer, that she went so far as to welcome fresh toils and privations as so many graces sent from God to enable her to stand worthily one day before His face, and give up her account as a true and faithful housewife.¹ We can imagine the tender and almost reverent care which this pious, prayer-loving mother would bestow on the spiritual training of her little Anne Catharine, whom from her birth she perceived to be no ordinary child. She it was who first taught her her Catechism, and to lisp, even before she scarce understood the sense of the words, "Lord, not as I will, but as Thou wilt! Lord, give me patience, and then strike hard!"—words which entered deeply into the child's soul, and were the constant cry of her heart through life. When sending her off to play with companions of her own age, her mother used to tell the little

¹ Hausemütter.

thing that if children were good and played amiably together, the holy Angels or the Child Jesus would come and join in their games, which Anne Catharine, in her innocent faith, of course, literally believed, and would often stand and look longingly towards heaven, expecting to see them coming, and indeed she was fully persuaded often that they were invisibly present. "My mother also bade me," she relates, "in going and coming to and from church, to walk either a little in front or a little behind the others, that I might hear nothing that was not quite right, and to say short prayers as I went along; so I bethought me I should be quite safe by making the sign of the Cross on my forehead, mouth, and breast, which crosses should be so many keys which I would give to the Infant Jesus for Him to lock up my thoughts, heart, and mouth, and let nothing wicked enter therein."

However tired Bernhard Emmerich might be after a long day's work, he never omitted calling his children round him at nightfall to pray for travellers, wounded soldiers, and all in distress; and on fasting days he made them all say five "Our Fathers" prostrate on their faces, with arms extended, in reparation for the sins that had been committed during the day.

Such was the atmosphere of Anne Catharine's home. Dearly loved as she was, however, by both parents, their fondness manifested itself in no external marks of tenderness or indulgence. On the contrary, whatever appeared blameable in her conduct was invariably punished with as much severity as in the case of the other children, whilst the hardest work always fell to her share. Her deft little hands were almost indispensable to her father in his outdoor labour, where her merry prattle sweetened many a long hour's toil, and yet those baby-fingers were never spared. To quote but one occasion; when a very few summers had gone over her head, little Anne Catharine

was made to carry no less than twenty loads of corn to the waggon, without pausing for a moment to rest ; a task which she accomplished in half the time which a strong farm-lad would have taken ! Under this stern tuition the poor child had often much to suffer, for besides the corporal austerities laid upon her, her parents, who, when unseen by her, would weep tears of joy and gratitude over the abundance of graces gradually developing themselves in the soul of their child, invariably sought to hide their wonderment and delight under a harsh exterior, chiding her when blame there was none, in order that the innocence and unconscious purity of her inner life might remain unknown to herself as to others, and untarnished by word of praise, admiration, or curiosity.

The very country in which she dwelt seemed as though specially adapted for the unfolding of a pure, beautiful child's life, with its gently undulating hills, smiling meadows, fine old groups of trees, and the greenest of green coppices, carpeted with moss and flowers, and shady nooks and glades, thickly overhung with those great luscious blackberries so dear to the heart of every true child, where no sound was heard the livelong day save the song of birds, the gentle lowing of grazing cattle, and ever and anon the musical tinkle of the Angelus bell, telling its glad tidings over mountain and valley, wood and plain. However coarse the work, however lowly the task over which Anne Catharine bent, there was always a something unnameable in her appearance which made the most casual passer-by turn and look and look again after the little maiden with the large clear brown eyes, beaming so brilliantly, yet with so soft, indefinable, and winning an expression from under her broad, arched brows, with her long hair combed straight back from her temples, and wound in thick coils round and

round her head, her sweet lips ever parted in half audible prayers, and her whole countenance radiant with the joyousness of her pure and innocent youth.

CHAPTER II.

Infused Knowledge and Spiritual Training.

THE marvellous gifts with which Almighty God adorned the soul of this holy child, began to manifest themselves from the hour of her birth, and she could truly say, with St. Hildegarde (with whose infancy her own bore some resemblance), "From the very commencement of my being, from the instant in which God gave me the breath of life, whilst yet in my mother's womb, He implanted the gift of miraculous knowledge in my soul." A few hours only after her birth, whilst being carried to the parish church at Coesfeld for baptism, she was distinctly conscious of passing events, and narrated subsequently how much she felt her helplessness as a new-born infant, carried alternately by three old women, one of whom inspired her with an intense aversion. "I felt quite ashamed," she said, "at being so small and feeble, when I felt so old. All was perfectly clear and comprehensible to me. I distinctly saw the old cottage in which we lived, and many things in it which I did not find there later, owing to changes having been made in the furniture. I knew that I was being carried along the road from Flamske to the parish church at Coesfeld. I felt and saw

everything that went on around me. I saw all the sacred ceremony of my own baptism, for my eyes and heart were opened then in a miraculous manner. From that moment my guardian angel made himself visibly present to me, as he always did at a later time.

“During baptism I beheld my guardian angel, my patron saints, St. Anne and St. Catharine, standing near me, whilst the Mother of God herself came towards me, bearing the infant Jesus in her arms, Who placed a ring upon my finger, and chose me then and there for His spouse. At the same time everything holy, everything blessed, everything connected with the Church was made known to me. All the past, present, and future of the Church passed before my mind in a series of almost palpable pictures. I *felt* the presence of God in the Blessed Sacrament, I saw a bright light issuing from the relics of the Saints preserved in the Church, and recognized the Saints themselves, who appeared to me hovering in the air above. I saw all my own ancestors, from the first one who was baptized in the seventh century, and I recognized many nuns and hermits amongst them, two of whom had received the stigmata ; a fact hitherto unknown. I saw them all in succession, until it came to myself, when my own future life was also laid before me in a series of allegorical pictures. I cannot describe how I felt all this, but so it was. When we left the church and I was carried through the churchyard on our way home, the actual condition of each soul belonging to the bodies lying there, was manifested to me. I could distinguish some of the bodies themselves shining brilliantly through their tombs ; this sight filled me with a holy awe, for I knew them to be those of saints.”

Thus we perceive that from her very birth Anne Catharine had received the gift of spiritual vision in so exalted and powerful a degree, that her bodily senses were capable of

a perception and activity far above the usual measure. The sphere of supernatural contemplation is the kingdom of grace into which man is incorporated by means of the Church at his baptism ; hence Anne Catharine's expression, " After baptism her eyes were miraculously opened." On her way to the church she sees natural, earthly things ; *after* receiving the Sacrament, when she has become a living member of the Church, the hidden mysteries of the tombs are rendered visible to her ; she feels and recognizes the secret and manifold beauties of the Church, into which she has been born, although yet ignorant, in accordance with her age, of the Faith which shall be the key to open the inmost chambers of those wonders, which, as yet, she contemplated upon the surface.

Henceforth her infant soul turned to its spiritual mother the Church, as the nursling seeks the bosom of its earthly mother, and is quiet and calm in her arms. Without knowing why, by a purely natural instinct, before she could speak, she understood the different feasts ; the ceremonial of the Church was her greatest delight ; all was so intensely palpable to her, that, whilst a babe in arms, she loved to dip her little hands into the holy water stoup, whenever she was taken into a church or chapel, for the sake of feeling the beneficial effects of the contact with that which the Church had blessed, whilst following the devotions and pious practices of her parents, as far as the weakness of her babyhood could keep pace with the miraculous illumination of her soul.

" I was scarcely four years old," she says, " when my parents took me to church with them. I remember firmly expecting to find God there, and also men and women totally different from those I knew, much handsomer and different altogether. When I entered, I looked round on all sides, and nothing was as I had expected. The priest was at the altar ; I thought he might be God ;

but I looked everywhere for the Blessed Virgin ; I had imagined that everything would be far grander than I could possibly have dreamt, but I did not find what I had expected to find. Two years later I still had these same ideas, and I kept continually looking at two girls of a certain age, who wore mantles, and had a singular air of modesty and reserve ; I thought one of them might be her whom I sought, but no ! I was disappointed again. I always believed that Our Lady would wear a sky-blue mantle, with a white veil and a plain white gown. I had had once a vision of Paradise, and I was always looking for Adam and Eve in church, and expecting to see them beautiful, as they were before the Fall. However I consoled myself with thinking that after I had once been to confession I should see them. I went to confession, but still I did not see them. At last a very pious and noble family came into the church ; the girls were dressed in white ; I thought I saw something about them like my expectations, and they inspired me with great respect ; but still they were not what I sought. I always had the impression that everything I did see was ugly and very dirty. I was so constantly absorbed in thoughts of this nature that I forgot to eat and drink, till my parents used to wonder and say, "What is the matter with that child? what has happened to little Anne Catharine?"

As the child grew in years, Our Blessed Lord Himself deigned to take her spiritual training into His own hands, and gave her for a constant companion one of His holy angels, who should teach her how to serve her God, in the practice of every virtue, how to turn every thought and affection of her heart to God alone, and to the imitation of her blessed Saviour in His purity, in His charity, and above all, in His sufferings.

Together with all the other graces of baptism, she

seemed to have received in an especial measure that of the most angelic purity of body and mind. She was never known when a babe to be troublesome, to scream, or to fly into passions like other infants, but was always so quiet, gentle, and winsome in her ways that she was not the darling of her parents only, but of all the simple country people also amongst whom she passed her life. In the history of another holy child, afterwards the great St. Catharine of Siena, we read that all her neighbours and relatives disputed who should have the most of her company, and would scarcely bear to let her out of their sight ; just so was this little peasant child the joy of all who knew her. The brightness of an indescribable purity which shone upon her sweet face gave an irresistible charm to every look, every gesture, and every word of the modest, gentle little girl, and invested all her actions as she advanced in years, unknown to herself, with a sanctity which shed a softening, hallowing influence upon all around. One of the effects of this spotless purity was, that until the day of her death Anne Catharine retained the unsuspecting guilelessness of an innocent child, knowing nothing of the world, because utterly free from all consciousness of self, and her whole being bound up in God alone. So pleasing was this simplicity to God that we find it clearly designated as the cause of all those marvellous operations of grace with which he honoured this chosen soul. Almighty God, throughout her life, ever treated her as a child, and in His admirable wisdom.

Amidst the wonderful outpourings of light with which He flooded her soul, He took care that she should always preserve her childlike ways and instincts, and her modesty and timidity. By the side of the heroism which perpetually thirsted for new sufferings and the terrible austerity of her earthly mission, beginning with her infancy, remained the innocent light-heartedness of the

child, who knows no care because it knows no sin, who, the tears wet upon her cheek, turned smiling and joyous to every rare gleam of consolation which like a ray of sunlight momentarily beamed across the sea of sorrows whose waters broke over her soul in an endless succession of tempestuous waves. Such sun-beams were, in later life, the pictures of her childhood, which God in His paternal mercy caused to pass before her mind. At such moments Anne Catharine became a child again, felt herself once more a happy little peasant-maid in her parent's cottage, and gained renewed strength and courage to press forwards upon the steep and rugged way of the Cross, which grew ever steeper and more rugged the nearer she drew to the goal.

The gift of this purity was, however, a treasure which could be procured by suffering and penance only, and maintained in its splendour and integrity by unintermitting acts of self-conquest and self-abnegation. Hence the career of patient endurance which began before the child was a year old. One day whilst her mother was in church at Coesfeld, she had a presentiment that something was wrong at home. She hurried back and found Anne Catharine lying on the ground with a broken leg from a fall. The limb was then unskilfully set, and so clumsily bandaged, that it wasted, and full three years elapsed before Anne Catharine could put it to the ground without pain. She had scarcely reached the age when she could impose voluntary austerities upon herself, before she eagerly embraced every opportunity which presented itself of self-conquest and mortification with a steadfastness and wisdom taught her by her Angel, whose guidance she followed implicitly in these practices. In one corner of the cottage she had hung up a picture of Our Lady with the Infant Jesus in her arms against the wall, and placed a block of wood in front of it to serve as an altar. Hither

she brought all the little presents she received and all her toys, dear to her as to all other children, and left them as an offering to the Holy Child, fully convinced that anything of which she voluntarily deprived herself would be pleasing to Him, this she did so simply and joyously that it was impossible for anyone to find fault with her. Great was her delight when sometimes her gifts disappeared, as she was then sure that the Child Jesus had taken them away, and the harder the sacrifice had been to make, the greater joy had she in its acceptance.

To such a height did this purity of soul attain, that in her third year she would often be heard praying fervently : "Oh! my dear Lord, let me die; for when one grows up, one must offend Thee so often and by such enormous sins!" and again when crossing the cottage threshold she was heard to say, "Could I but fall down dead now, I should never offend God more!" As she grew older and associated with other children, she used to give them every thing that was in her power to give for God's sake, and at the age of four had already risen to so high a pitch of mortification that she never allowed herself to satisfy her hunger at any meal, eating so sparingly that it appeared a miracle how life was supported within her, moreover invariably choosing the worst portions when at her parent's table, mentally offering her own share to God for Him to bestow upon the poor who needed it the most. The poor and needy of every description lay so close to her heart that the first interior sufferings of her life were the pangs of an intense pity for the woes of others. If she heard of an illness or of any kind of misfortune whatever, her compassion was so deeply aroused, that she turned pale and sat motionless as if about to faint, until brought to herself by the anxious questionings of her parents. So burning was her desire to be of use to the sufferers, that she would, in glowing words implore of Almighty

God to lay the sorrow upon herself, and spare her neighbour. If she saw anyone hungry or thirsty, she would run towards him, saying with touching simplicity, "Wait, oh! wait a minute, I will fetch you some bread from our house." Her good mother never thwarted her in this, and received her guests very kindly, when they arrived. The child would even go so far as to take off and give away her own clothing, coaxing her mother's consent in sweet prayers which were always irresistible from her lips. She never saw a child crying or in pain without begging God to lay upon her the cause of its tears, and give her the illness, provided the child might be cured. These prayers were often almost instantaneously granted. Anne Catharine received the pain and witnessed the child become calm and happy, when she would joyfully exclaim, "See! if we do not pray, we get no grace. Thou, my God, dost never help those who know neither how to pray nor to suffer, therefore I must do it for them." Then again, if she saw a child fall into some bad habit or committing a fault, she would pray for its amendment, never failing however to lay some penance upon herself so as to ensure being heard, and being allowed to receive the punishment due to the child. In later years, when asked what could put the idea of such prayers into her head at that age, she replied simply "I cannot say who taught them to me, it came from my sympathy. I have ever felt that we are all One Body in Jesus Christ, and therefore, like the fingers to the hand, the grief of my neighbours was hurt to me. From my babyhood I always prayed to take upon myself the illnesses of others. I always thought that God had some special reason for every pain He inflicted, and that there must be a certain penalty to pay. When therefore I sometimes saw sufferings pressing so hardly upon some one person, I thought it was because there was no one willing to help

him to pay his debt, and so I then implored God to let me acquit it, and I prayed to the Child Jesus to help me, Who soon sent me as much pain as I could wish. I remember once my mother was ill in bed with erysipelas in her face. I was alone with her and full of pity for her poor swollen head. Kneeling down in a corner of the room, I prayed with all my might; then I bound a cloth round her head and set to work praying again. Soon I was seized with a violent toothache and my whole face swelled up. When the others returned they found my mother quite well again, and I, too, soon got better. A few years after that I suffered indescribable anguish from seeing both my parents dangerously ill, and kneeling by their bedside, I prayed earnestly. As I prayed, I found my own hands folded and raised above their heads, and was bidden interiorly to lay one upon each of my sick parents and pray until they should be cured."

If ever Anne Catharine saw or heard of any sin, her grief knew no bounds and she would sob bitterly. When asked what was the cause of her incomprehensible affliction, she was utterly incapable of giving a satisfactory answer, on account of which she received many a rebuke and was often called obstinate and eccentric, which however never diminished in the slightest degree the loving impulse of her heart to supplicate Almighty God and do penance for the spiritual necessities of others. One day, when about four years old, she was standing by the cradle of a dying infant, with its mother, when the father in a fit of drunken rage, threw a hatchet at his wife's head, which threatened to fall on that of the child. Quick as thought, Anne Catharine placed herself in the way, and received the blow on her own head, thus saving the child's life, and preserving the wretched father from the guilt of murder. Another time she beheld some children at play, committing an offence against modesty. So

great was her distress, that she plunged into a bed of stinging nettles, imploring God to let the pain she suffered atone for their sin.

Another special object of her compassion was the Jewish people, whom she thought the most unfortunate of all unfortunate races in the world. Her father once took her, when a child, into a Synagogue, "Oh! how I pitied them," she says, when relating the fact, "I could not look without weeping at all those poor unhappy people who are so hardened, they *will* not seek their own salvation. Oh! how I pity them. They have nothing in common with the dear holy old Jews of old that I so often see, but these Jews of the present day spring from the Pharisees, the perverse sect of the ancient Jews. Poor, poor things! I always feel deeply their misery and blindness, which seem the sadder when one hears them talk so beautifully of Almighty God as they do so sometimes. Once they possessed the living seed of salvation; but they would not recognize the fruit, even treading it under foot: and now they have left off even seeking for it!"

The most marvellous, in our eyes, of all the mortifications which Anne Catharine imposed upon herself was her unintermitting practice of nocturnal prayer. So early as in her fourth year, when the long night's rest is of the utmost importance to the well-being of a child, she deprived herself of several hours' sleep, in order to give the time to prayer. She always liked to pray in the open air, and her favourite haunt was a field, at some little distance up the hill, above the cottage, whence Coesfeld church could be seen, and here, when her parents had gone to sleep, the heroic child hastened from her bed, and knelt, with arms outstretched, supported by her good angel, praying fervently for two and three hours, sometimes until morning dawned. It must not be imagined, however, that because God, in His mysterious designs,

required this nightly prayer of an innocent child, inspired her, through the medium of her familiar angel, with the wish to practise it, and gave her sufficient strength to accomplish it, that the sacrifice of her rest cost her nothing, or even grew easier to her from force of habit. On the contrary, we usually find, when observing God's ways with favoured souls such as hers, that they attain step after step on the road towards the perfection which He designs for them, by dint of a faithful co-operation with the graces they receive, and an unceasing and incredibly painful warfare against the infirmities of human nature. Thus never did a night pass without nature asserting her rights, and clamourously demanding rest and refreshment for that tender little body, already wearied with the austerities of the day ; but no sooner did the brave child hear the voice of her angel, bidding her rise and pray, than she sprang from her bed, obeying instantly, whilst wiping away the hot tears which the involuntary repugnance natural to a child wrung from her at the prospect of plunging into the darkness of the night. She bethought herself of a means by which to ensure an instantaneous alacrity in awakening at any hour, and this was to fill her bed with pieces of wood and coils of rope, thereby rendering rest almost impossible, and conquering by increased discomfort the remaining weakness of her nature. God could not long resist such constancy, and by degrees He permitted Anne Catharine's soul to gain so great an ascendancy over her body that eventually she was enabled to exist without any sleep, and to the end of her life could worship her Lord day and night without rest or pause.

We may well wonder what subjects a child of four years old could find to occupy so many hours' prayer. Those subjects were, however, as numerous and diverse as the causes for which the Almighty required her to plead.

He Himself showed her her nightly task in visions. She saw, in a series of pictures, every sorrow and misfortune, mental and physical, which can befall mankind : not in their generality alone, but in every particular case in which God intended to make use of her and her supplications as His medium of succour and consolation. Thus she beheld all the hidden miseries and sins of prisons, hospitals, asylums, houses of correction, galleys, the holds and dungeons of pirate ships ; she saw numbers of the sick and dying, of every age and condition—some groaning impatiently under their sufferings, some about to leave this world impenitent and unconfessed, others neglected and forsaken by all ; travellers who had missed their way, and were in danger of perishing ; thousands of homeless, starving, heavily-afflicted, despairing souls ; and unfortunates hovering on the brink of a bottomless abyss, whose consolation and deliverance God chose should be her work.

And this, not of her own land alone, but likewise of Russia, China, the heathen in the far-off islands of the Pacific Ocean, the remote valleys of Switzerland, the Tyrol and Savoy, the mountain heights of Northern Asia, America—wherever trod the foot of man, there did her compassion extend. Her angel seconded her requests, and the intensity of her charity made the little supplicator so eloquent, so daring, and so importunate, that the hours, far from appearing long, were too short for all her wants. When once asked what she generally prayed for, she replied : “ I scarcely ever asked for anything for myself : I always prayed for others ; that no sin might be committed and no souls lost. I asked everything of God, and the more I received the more I wanted. I was never satisfied. I thought to myself : He possesses all things, and He must be pleased when we are bold in asking for everything we want.”

We may judge of the degree of perfection to which these practices had raised her soul, by the words of Overberg, her extraordinary confessor, who, speaking of these her youthful prayers, says : "From the time she was six years old, Anne Catharine knew no joy save in God, and no sorrow or affliction except that of seeing this her beloved Lord offended by His creatures ; and once she had commenced her course of penance and mortification, so ardent a love of Almighty God was kindled in her heart that she was heard to pray : "Were there no such places as heaven, hell, or purgatory, I should love Thee, O my God, above all things, and with the whole strength of my heart."

During the time of the French Revolution, many of the terrible and heart-rending scenes of those days were represented to her, and Anne Catharine was several times carried in spirit into the cell of the unfortunate Queen Marie Antoinette, in order to pray for her consolation and support. These visits made so deep an impression on her mind, that she used often to talk to her parents and brothers and sisters about the troubles of the poor Queen, imploring them to join their prayers with her own for her deliverance, till these simple peasants, utterly unable to understand the meaning of her words, declared she must either be dreaming, or if what she said was true, that she was a witch to know what was passing so far off. Their words created much disturbance and anxiety in the child's heart, who immediately went to confession, and it was sometime before her confessor, to whom she narrated the circumstance, could set her mind at rest. She often received a charge to assist the dying with her prayers, as in the case of the King Louis XVI. and his fellow-sufferers, the sight of whose patient resignation affected her deeply, and she amazed those around her with her allusions to the unfortunate royal family, saying how good

it was that they had been taken away out of so much misery and horror.

The greater portion of her prayers was, however, bestowed on the holy souls, who perpetually came to her side, beseeching her aid. In winter-time, she knelt with her bare knees in the snow throughout the night, until she was almost frozen, praying for them with outstretched arms ; and in summer, either upon sharp stones or nettles, with which latter plants she scourged herself, in order to make her prayers on their behalf more efficacious by her own suffering. As a reward she was often permitted to receive the thanks of the souls she had liberated. She related some years later that once, when a child, she was led by an unknown person into a place which seemed like Purgatory ; “ there I saw,” she said, “ many souls in great pain, who begged me to pray for them. I seemed to be going into a deep abyss, where everything was very still and quiet, which terrified, and yet at the same time touched me, there were so many souls all looking so sad, and yet with something in their faces which told of joy somewhere still in their hearts, and it seemed as if their thoughts were all of the mercy of God. I saw no fire, but I felt that the poor creatures were suffering unutterable interior torments. When I used to be praying very fervently for the poor dear souls, I often heard voices near me, saying : ‘ I thank thee ! I thank thee ! ’ One day I lost a little locket on the road to church that my mother had given me, which loss distressed me very much, and I felt as if I had committed a sin in not taking better care of it. That evening I forgot to pray for the holy souls, but as I was fetching in some logs of wood, a white form, covered with black-looking spots, passed close to me, and whispered : ‘ Thou hast forgotten me.’ I was very much ashamed, and immediately began the prayers I had omitted, and the next day I found my

locket again in the snow. When I was old enough to go to a low Mass at Coesfeld, I always walked on by myself, in order that I might pray uninterruptedly for the suffering souls ; and if the morning was yet dark, I often saw them flitting around me two and two, looking like shining pearls seen through a thick mist. They made the road quite light, and I was very happy in their company, because I knew and loved them, as for many a night they had been with me begging for my prayers."

The ancestors of our Blessed Lady were amongst the most constant of these her companions, owing to her frequent contemplation of the Holy Family at Bethlehem, and her desire of learning more about the early years of the Mother of God. She had received a multitude of visions about the race from which the Blessed Virgin sprang, as far back as the fourth and fifth generations. They were shown always to her as wonderfully pious, simple-minded people, whose souls were entirely possessed and governed by the desire of the coming of the promised Messiah, and who led peaceable, quiet, and charitable lives amidst rough and uncultivated tribes of comparative barbarians. Often when praying to God in the meadows, with her cows grazing quietly round her, she would find herself amongst them in spirit, and accompany them into the depths of forest and mountain solitudes, whence they fled to practise the mysteries of their religion, to devote themselves to acts of penance, and to escape from the curiosity and malevolence of their savage neighbours. These ancestors of the Blessed Virgin were called Essenians, and if the child took a special pleasure in dwelling upon their past lives, and in contemplating them in her dream-pictures, until she knew their faces and figures as well as those of her own family, her interest for their souls now languishing in Purgatory was still more intense, and she constantly felt the urgent desire to offer

her prayers and satisfaction to God in payment for the debt of punishment they had incurred by the faults and omissions of their lives. It was at the season of Advent especially, when all Anne Catharine's thoughts were occupied with the coming mysteries of Christmas, that these holy souls urgently besieged her sympathies, and they flocked round her in crowds as she knelt during the nights in prayer upon the hill above the cottage, or when she trudged through the fields, up to her knees in snow, which lay between her house and Coesfeld, in order to get to church for the "Rorate" at the Church of St. James. In narrating this circumstance she says naïvely : " Besides, I had a little personal interest in doing what I could to help them, for I knew that these dear souls, out of gratitude for my prayers and a constant wish for more, would wake me at the hour I wanted to get up, and not let me oversleep myself. And so they did to the very minute, coming in the shape of faintly-shining little lights, which hovered over my bed and woke me so punctually that I had always time to say my morning prayers for them. I then sprinkled some holy water upon them and upon myself, got dressed, and started for Coesfeld, whither these poor dear little lights accompanied me, ranged on either side of the road as in a procession, and as I walked along I used to sing psalms, with my heart filled with love towards God ; and whilst I sang, fresh crowds of our gracious Lady's forefathers came hurrying towards me over the mountains and plains, all filled with longing after the Face of God ; and somehow or other I always got to the church in time for the Mass of the ' Rorate,' though the dear souls often took me very much out of my way, by leading me along past all the Stations of the Cross."

CHAPTER III.

Anne Catharine's Visions in her Childhood.

THE wealth of visions with which Almighty God was pleased to inundate Anne Catharine's soul began to manifest itself to all around her as soon as she could speak plainly, and although, as has been mentioned, her extraordinary utterances now and then occasioned her a petty persecution from her ignorant relatives, it was her father's greatest delight, on reaching home of an evening, tired after a long day's work, to call his little girl to his knee by the fire-side and bid her tell him stories. Then she would relate such wonderful pictures of the events she saw in the history of the Old Testament, so simply and naturally, and in such vivid language, that Bernhard Emerich, unable to restrain his tears, exclaimed from time to time, "Child, how dost thou know this?" and Anne Catharine reply: "Father it is so, I can see it all!" when he would relapse into silence and close attention once more, wondering where his child learnt such things.

No matter what her occupation, these pictures were ever present to her mind at all hours of the day, and as she innocently believed that it was the same with everyone else as with herself, she used to speak openly of what she saw, and was not a little indignant when other children contradicted or laughed at what she said. Once it happened that a pilgrim, who gave out that he had visited Rome and Jerusalem, began to speak of the holy places

before her, giving an incorrect description of them. The impetuous child, unable longer to restrain herself, boldly accused the man of telling lies, and thereupon commenced describing the holy places as though intimately acquainted with them. Upon this she received a sharp reprimand from her parents for being rude, and was more prudent for the future; nevertheless another day at the village school, which was superintended by an old peasant, she broke forth into a glowing description of the resurrection of our Lord just as it was then present to her mind, and again met with a stern rebuke, being bidden never to let her imagination play with such subjects. These and similar experiences closed the child's mouth upon what she said, for the time being, but the visions far from ceasing, became towards the end of the Church's year even fuller, clearer, and more and more vivid and rich in detail. All the glorious mysteries of faith were unfolded before her mind in a series of grand pictures, following one another in their regular order and sequence.

The first of these historical revelations took place when she was either five or six years old. She was meditating one day upon the words, "I believe in God the Father Almighty; maker of heaven and earth," when a picture of the Creation was unrolled before her mental vision. After this, she beheld in like manner the revolt of the Angels, the creation of Adam and Eve, their fall, and expulsion from Paradise, and finally the whole of the Old Testament, in an unbroken chain of pictures, which gradually unfolded the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption of mankind throughout all ages, and all races of men, until its glorious consummation upon Calvary. She saw all the personages who, in the order appointed by God, were destined to bear a part in the advancement of "the plenitude of time," and beheld their lives down to the minutest details. She understood the particular

position and signification which each one held in the order of salvation respecting the coming of our Saviour. She saw the graces which God gave them, how He directed them, and how the blessed fruits of their actions were perpetuated from one generation to another. At the same time, she beheld all the machinations of hell and the varied forms and influence of the idolatries which should arise.

There was nothing which did not find a place in the sphere of this humble child's visions. Thus, whilst the profoundest mysteries of grace were disclosed to her gaze, she lost none of the minor details connected with the sacred history. Thus, for example, whilst she saw the body of Adam in its glorified state before the fall, and the humiliating consequences which ensued to him from that fall, she also beheld, by a mysterious connexion with the Five Wounds of our Lord's Body, the five sources of light which Adam lost by his sin, and which, through the infinite merits of those life-giving wounds, should be restored to him in a future state.

At another time she saw the prophet Melchisedech measuring the ground for the basin afterwards known as the pool of Bethesda, and traversing the roads and paths announcing the future Messiah, which Jesus hereafter was to tread in His public life on earth. She saw Melchisedech likewise separating different races and families, leading them hither and thither, and laying the stone of the future Temple upon Sion. She saw him planting in the river Jordan what looked like seeds of the stones which should, later on, support the ark of alliance, when God's own people re-took possession of the inheritance of their forefathers, and which stones, after a long period of oblivion, should once more re-appear from under the waters of Jordan, to serve as a font for the baptism of the Son of Mary, the accomplishment of the type figured by the

Ark of Alliance. Not only did Anne Catharine see, in rotation, all the events which occurred in the lives of Noah, Enoch, Abraham, and all the patriarchs, but she also recognized the figurative signification of each one of their actions, and discerned the interior links of grace, and its mysterious influences ; grace, which is the living and eternal bond by which all persons, generations and epochs are connected together, and which is the centre-point of all ages.

Thus she arrived at the time for the accomplishment of the prophecies, and as, formerly, she beheld the new in the old, so now she found the old in the new. The entire life of the Man God upon earth, from the moment of His most holy Incarnation, until the hour of his Ascension into Heaven, passed before her eyes in living pictures, which embraced the whole theatre of His career and earthly operations, and all the persons with whom He held particular intercourse. She saw our Lord in the fruits of His infinite merits, she saw Him as the Head of humanity regenerated in Him, that is to say, of His Mystical Body the Church, and she contemplated the latter in its entire hierarchy, in all its parts and degrees, without limit of time or space. In the Person of Jesus Christ the Head, the ranks of the Church Triumphant were opened to her gaze : she was ravished in spirit to assist at their celestial festivals, following the order of the ecclesiastical year, and thereat received consolations which enabled her to endure the fatigues of her earthly course. The ranks of the Church militant were also thrown open to her ; and whilst visiting them, she not only succoured but also consoled, assisted, unbound and delivered.

Finally, in Jesus Christ every age of the Church was made visible to her, together with the lives of all the Saints, and the working of their influence from the time of the Apostles until the period in which she lived, when,

like an industrious little bee, she collected all the blessed fruits of their merits, and applied them to the healing of all the necessities of her own time.

All these visions bore the most religiously historical character ; they were not meditations upon past events, but the immedate reflexion of the facts themselves presented to Anne Catharine's mind like a picture mirrored in a lake. Thus she received the images as they showed themselves to her, sometimes welcoming them joyfully, expressing naively her admiration and surprise, at others seeking to escape from them when the subjects they represented appeared to cause her more grief than she could bear. Her behaviour was purely passive throughout all the visions of her life : she never attempted to reason mentally about them when her angelic guide did not explain their meaning, and therefore all that she has related on the subject is distinguished by an admirable simplicity and clearness, although at the same time by a mysterious depth which irresistibly impresses on the reader the conviction that here is nothing invented, nothing which could have derived its origin in the human brain. She could never accustom herself to find any pleasure whatever in books, and rarely opened them ; all her knowledge was derived exclusively from her visions. In her seventh year, after having been barely four months at school, she was sent home by the master who declared she already knew everything he could teach her : she said once of herself, " I never learnt anything by heart out of the Bible or the Gospels ; for I always saw it all from the time I can remember : every year I saw the same things passing in exactly the same manner and with the same attendant circumstances, although sometimes accompanied by other scenes. I have frequently been present personally at the occurrences as though I formed part of them ; but generally I felt myself raised above the

scene and saw it all happening below. There were other things, touching mystical meanings and significations which I saw inwardly, as though reflected upon the conscience. I had also the faculty of seeing through all things, so that no one body hid another from my sight: without this power, there would have been a confusion in my mind."

Even at a more advanced age, Anne Catharine could never familiarize herself with books: "At the Convent," she says, "I wished to look into a book now and then, but it always was an annoyance to me. Thanks be to God I have hardly read a line, and when I see a book it seems to me as if I already know it by heart." This last remark applied particularly to ascetical works and the lives of Saints, the reason of which she explains in a remark she made when asked if she would like to read the Life of St. Francis Xavier, "There is no Saint," she said, "about whom I have seen so many things: I think I know his whole life. These written lives seem to me like the labels which are hung here and there upon threads in gardens, to show what seed has been sown in such and such a spot, whilst the piece of ground itself still resembles barren land, whereas I can see in my mind a beautiful fertile garden, filled with flowers."

Thus the scenes and characters of the Church's history became, as will easily be understood, more familiar and comprehensible to the child's mind than her own actual surroundings. The latter appeared to her like a dream: she saw, to use her own expression, with her eyes, without seeing, so incessantly were they turned inwards upon that luminous world, whose dazzling labyrinths and paths she trod hand-in-hand with saints and angels.

Amongst all the holy personages with whom she thus became acquainted, her favourites, those to whom she felt the greatest devotion were they who had been

the most nearly connected with Our Lord's Sacred Humanity. As for instance, St. Joachim and St. Anne, St. Zacharias, and St. Elisabeth. She felt herself quite at home with them, and frequently accompanied them in their pilgrimages to Jerusalem and the other holy places celebrating their feast days with them, during their time of eager, anxious expectation, and joining in their loving adoration of their Saviour, the gladsome Christmas night in Bethlehem ; she was acquainted with all the splendour and the riches of the Temple, the secret mysteries concealed in the holy of holies, the ark of the covenant with its contents, the priests and sacrifices, in fact, with all the innumerable customs and ceremonies of the old law, and every tradition and custom of the faithful believers of the house of Israel.

Much resemblance may be traced between little Anne Catharine at this period of her life and the great St. Catharine of Siena, who, like her, was prepared in her early years for the great deeds she was later to accomplish, by means of visions of past ages of the Church, and by her intimacy with the ancient fathers and the penitents of the Thebaid. In their school she acquired so great liberty of spirit, and so undisturbed a union with God, that amidst papal crowned heads and all the noisiest bustle of the world in its high places, she remained calm and recollected as when hidden in the privacy of her convent cell. For years and years she was permitted to contemplate those early saints in their daily lives, as though bodily present ; she sang psalms and prayed with them, worked with them, weaving mats and baskets of osier and reed, learnt to fast and to do penance, to keep silence, renounce self, and practise mortification, learnt complete detachment from creatures, and indeed, the practice of every Christian virtue, whilst she grew the while as intimate and happy with them as

was little Anne Catharine with her St. Joachim, St. Anne, and all their holy company.

A primary law of Anne Catharine's life was, that the graces she received should ever be accompanied by proportionate sufferings. These visions were no exception. The mission which God had appointed for her in this world was, to suffer in her person for the Catholic faith, and to offer herself as a living sacrifice of reparation for the presumptuous wickedness of a century when men dared to dispute the possibility of a Divine revelation, when they denied the truths of the Incarnation and Redemption, denied heaven and hell, and heaped every species of diabolical blasphemy and abuse upon the prophets, apostles, saints, and holy children of the Church, past and present. In these terrible times Anne Catharine, enabled by the gift of prophecy, which she had received from above, to contemplate the whole course of the mysteries of salvation, and understand their meaning in its fullest extent, adored and worshipped the Redeemer of Mankind in the fulfilment of His secret designs, with a fervour so glowing as to be, as He Himself deigned to say, a compensation for the insults which His mercies were receiving at the hands of heretics and unbelievers, and joyfully took upon herself, in expiation of the sins of others, bodily and mental tortures and sufferings, whose acuteness might well have made the stoutest heart tremble, but which she bore from the earliest years to the last hour of her life with a patience and resignation beyond words to describe; her anguish only breaking forth now and again in some such pitiful laments as this, "Lord, why must I see these horrible things? what can I, a weak child, do to hinder crime? If thou didst but know what I suffer!" This suffering had for its origin, her profound sense of God's sanctity, and of the vileness of the world, as occasioned by sin; and as every abomi-

nation and baseness of sinful humanity were displayed before her eyes, in order that she should do penance for these innumerable offences, the pure, innocent child often thought Nature would give way, and that she must die under the horror of the spectacle.

Jesus Christ Himself condescended to be her guide in this immeasurable territory of revelation, and taught her, with His own lips, the key to the most unfathomable of the Divine secrets, bestowing upon her, at the same time, strength of soul sufficient to enable her to endure the unutterable grandeur of her visions, and to bring her inner life into perfect harmony with her humble everyday duties.

For weeks and weeks she would be absorbed in contemplation, her mind utterly unconscious of what was passing around her, and yet everything she did, whether handiwork, field labour, or whatever task her parents gave her, was done as quickly and as well as though she had been intent on it alone. Every kind of work, whether indoor or outdoor, grew naturally under her hands, without her having the trouble of learning it; the first time she opened a book she found she could read perfectly; everything she undertook prospered, whilst no external event had ever the power to distract her mind for one moment from its calm, recollected state of contemplation. Her relatives were so accustomed to find the delicate child always eager to undertake the most laborious tasks, and to see them thrive under her fingers, that they left her undisturbed in her own quiet ways, and left off seeking to penetrate the deep silence of her soul by troublesome questions and remarks. The time was not yet come when Anne Catharine would have to fulfil the painful task of giving an account of the things she beheld, and of compressing within the narrow bounds of human words that wealth of Divine revelation which

overwhelmed her soul. Though pain and suffering were her inseparable companions, they could never rob the child for one moment of her wondrous inner life, and in later years she often longed wistfully after the calm seclusion of her childhood, saying, "At that time I was never out of God's presence, daily tasks never disturbed my inner abstraction, or my constant visions. If I were sewing, the pictures seemed so entirely to envelope me, that I felt as though my scissors were cutting through the beautiful objects which surrounded me. When at work in the fields with my parents, I was not upon earth; all here was as a dark, confused dream, whilst in that other world everything was light and clear, and filled with heavenly truths."

Our Blessed Lord was not her teacher in the realms of miraculous vision alone, but associated Himself with her daily life in a simple, child-like intercourse, by which He led her on step by step to perfection, and to an entire conformity with His wishes. Sometimes He stood before her in the form of a child bearing a cross, silently gazing at her, until touched to the quick by His patience, she would seize the heaviest piece of wood she could find, and carry it upon her shoulders as long as her strength would permit, praying all the while. At other times she beheld Him weeping over the injuries which impudent bold children were doing to him, and this sight drove her to fling herself amongst thorns and nettles, so that, by her innocent atonement, she might soften the anger and pain of her Lord. He often joined her, too, when making the Way of the Cross, and gave her His own cross to carry, and when she was at work in the fields, or minding the cows (which was her usual occupation until she was five years old), He came to her side, as one child to another, to share in its toil and in its recreation, thus showing her that all her doings and all her

comings and goings, however insignificant all her play hours might appear, were to be begun and carried out for the greater glory of God. Her own words describe this holy intercourse very sweetly, "When I was a child He used to work with me as a little boy, and used often to come and share my work. How kind He was to me ! I remember when I was six years old one of my brothers was about to be born, and my mother was anxious to make some piece of clothing for him, but was too weak to sew. At that time I did not know how to thread a needle, but the little Boy came and taught me, and helped me to make caps and all the little clothes needful for a young babe, out of some old dolls' clothes I had by me. My mother was amazed when I gave her my present, as she could not imagine how I had made them, and I saw her secretly weeping over them, though she hid her surprise from me, and used the little clothes. He used also to help me to mind the cows, or rather He made them quiet and tractable, whilst we talked together of all kinds of good things, how we would serve God, and how we would love the Child Jesus, and the like. This little Boy was with me perpetually, and taught me everything, how to make garments for the poor, how to knit stockings, and, in fact, whatever I wished to do, I did, thinking at the time it was my own fingers did everything, whereas it was really my little companion all the time. Once I recollect when I was visiting the crib in the church at Coesfeld one Christmas time, I felt an intense desire to hold the Child Jesus in my arms, and to talk to Him. When I left the crib, I sat down for awhile upon a little mound, and was noticing how green and mossy the grass was. I was quite a little thing at the time, and remember well that I had on a blue jacket lined with fur, and carried a small stick in my hand. After I had sat there for a little time, I was rapt in a vision, and beheld the Child Jesus coming towards

me. So I laid my jacket upon the ground, spread it out as a seat, and He came and sat down beside me, so sweetly and kindly. He then talked to me, and told me all about His Incarnation and about His parents, He told me, too, what happiness and glory He had left to come to earth for my sake, and how much ashamed I ought to be when I complained of any little pain I felt, after what He had done for me. He related to me all about His childhood and the humiliations He had to undergo, about Herod's persecutions, and the privations His dear mother endured in Egypt amongst a heathen people, and much else that I cannot remember now."

The blessing of this marvellous intercourse was felt by all with whom Anne Catharine came into contact, especially by her playmates and the children of her own age, into whose infantine games she always managed somehow or other to put a spiritual meaning. For instance, if she was strolling along with them in narrow paths, over which the high hedges formed a natural arch, she would invite the little troop to walk in procession, and imagine that the holy angels were present. "We will," she would say, "imagine this to be heaven, and do all in the name of Jesus, and always think that the Holy Child is amongst us. We will do nothing wicked, but try and prevent others doing wrong when we can, and if we find traps or snares set for hares or birds, we will take them away, and put a stop to the cruelty of idle lads. We will try and make quite a new world around us, which may be a real heaven upon earth." Sometimes the children played together in a sandpit, while Anne Catharine's clever little hands would be busy all the time modelling the holy places in Jerusalem for their amusement, as she knew them by her visions, for as she herself said, "Those spots were more familiar to me than any others upon earth. They were so constantly before my mind, that I could

describe and find my way to every nook and corner, and it used to be my great pleasure to gather my little play-fellows round me, and with damp sand or clay teach them what the holy places were like, by modelling the hill of Calvary, the Holy Sepulchre, and garden of Gethsemane, with a stream flowing through it. Across this brook a narrow bridge led to some square empty houses. Once I had a great mind to mould the figures of Our Lord and the two thieves, and His blessed Mother standing at the foot of the cross, but I did not do it, for fear it should be a sacrilege. One day two little children were playing out in the fields with me, and we were very anxious to have a cross for a little chapel we had made in clay, in order to say our prayers before it, and as we wanted a very fine one, and could not think how we were to get one, I exclaimed, "I know what we will do; you must cut it out in wood, and press it into the moist clay, and I have an old tin lid at home, which we will melt upon some coals and pour into the impression, and thus we shall have a splendid cross! I ran to fetch the lid and the coals, but just as we were in the middle of our work, my mother came out and punished me."

Every year the child's mysterious intercourse with the sacred persons and things of the New Testament became closer and closer. Sometimes it was St. John the Baptist who would come to her whilst tending her cows, in the form of his holy boyhood, and instruct her in all the wondrous mysteries of sanctity through which the angels had guided him in the wilderness, kindling in her soul ever more and more burning desires of imitating that simplicity and purity by which he had found so great favour in God's sight. During every Advent she never failed to accompany the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph in spirit upon their journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, and her anxiety for the welfare of the dear Mother of God, and

keen participation in all the discomforts and fatigues she endured upon the road, were boundless. The festivals of the Church were not simply matter for holy reflection or meditation, but actual present realities ; her whole soul went with them, as though the scenes they commemorated, were visibly enacted before her.

CHAPTER IV.

Early Dispositions and First Confession.

THE ritual of the Church was as an open book to Anne Catharine. Every detail connected therewith afforded her the greatest delight. She had the gift of recognizing the presence of consecrated objects and relics by their touch or smell. Holy relics invariably appeared to her surrounded by a shining light ; sometimes she saw tiny human faces hovering about them in the air. When once asked what were her sensations on touching relics, she replied : “ I cannot describe what I feel ; I not only *see*, but I *feel* that there is a bright light, sometimes stronger than at others. This light seems to come towards me, just as a flame follows a current of air, and I feel that there is a connecting link between that ray and another luminous body, and again between that body and a whole world of light, which light derives its source from a greater brilliancy still ; but who can explain such things ? That light charms me. I cannot resist pressing it to my heart,¹

¹ She always involuntarily carried to her heart any relics that were shown her.

and then it feels as though I entered by that light into the body to which it belongs, and into the scenes of the Saint's life, into his sufferings, trials, and triumphs."

As when a babe in arms, her great delight was to dip her little hands in the great *bénitier* of the church and bathe her face in it with joy at the contact of what the Church had blessed ; so throughout her life she never heard the sound of consecrated bells without a thrill of ecstasy passing through her, from the conviction that, as far as the sound of that peal could reach, it showered a blessing over the land, and drove out every evil spirit thence. "I believe firmly," she said one day, "that Satan is scared away by the sound of blessed bells. When I used to pray as a child in the fields above Coesfeld, I often felt and saw wicked demons round me, but the moment the church bells began to ring for Mass I always found they were gone. There is no sound so joyous, so soul-stirring, so invigorating or sacred to me as the metal tongues pealing forth God's blessing over hill and dale, and putting his enemies to flight on every side. Compared with them, all earthly music, even the great organ itself, is feeble and unmelodious to my ears."

The language of the Church spoke even more forcibly to her heart than her beloved bells. The Latin prayers at Holy Mass and every one of the various ceremonies were familiar to her as her mother-tongue. "I never knew," she once observed, "of there being any difference in languages where holy things were concerned, for I was never conscious of the words employed, but of the things themselves alone." So deep and vivid an appreciation had she of the power and beneficial effects of the priestly blessing, that, if ever a priest approached her home, she was supernaturally aware of the fact, and drawn to seek his blessing ; and if it so happened that she was minding her cows at the time, she confidently commended them

to the care of her angel whilst she hastened to receive the coveted blessing.

She had the same feeling for the first chapter of St. John's Gospel, which she carried rolled up in a little cover next her heart, and always declared that it was a protecting shield to which she turned in all her dangers or tribulations, repeating the words, "And the WORD was made flesh and dwelt among us." She often expressed her extreme surprise how any one could fail to be penetrated at once with the sense of those words ; indeed she flatly refused to credit such a possibility, until assured by her confessor that such unbelief, alas ! but too often existed in the world.

At a later period of her life, when, owing to the general suppression of convents and confiscation of church property, an innumerable number of holy relics were scattered broadcast over the country to be trampled under foot, hurled into the flames, or sold by sacrilegious hands for whatever they might fetch, Anne Catharine's grief and horror knew no bounds, and she eagerly seized every opportunity of awakening in the hearts of all who came into contact with her the desire of rescuing these objects, and an increased reverence for them. It soon became known far and wide, that no greater pleasure could be devised for Anne Catharine than by the bringing to her of some of these treasures, or by the asking her advice as to where they should be placed, in order that, by their greater veneration, atonement should be made for the insults to which they had been recently subjected. When she died, more than three hundred relics were found in her possession. She traced the history of each one intuitively at a glance, and had generally related it to those around her.

In the same degree with which Anne Catharine's soul was filled with reverence and devotion by the contact of

holy places and consecrated objects, was she aware (and with a corresponding horror), in certain spots, of the sins that had been there committed, and of the curse which rested upon the land in consequence : a curse which she was then, through her unfathomable pity, impelled to remove by supplication and penitential expiation. Not far from the cottage in which she lived, there was a strip of ground, utterly barren, lying between two abundantly productive meadows. Whenever she crossed this spot as a child, she shuddered involuntarily, and invariably felt as though she were being pushed backwards by an invisible hand ; she frequently fell to the ground for no reason whatever, and often she saw two dark shadows hovering about this field, and perceived that the cattle and horses in the adjacent fields began to grow shy and scared, refusing to approach that hedge within several yards. As she noticed that these mysterious signs occurred more and more frequently, she asked the country-people what was the history of that piece of waste ground, and subsequently ascertained that during the seven years' war a Hanoverian soldier had been executed on this spot, who was innocent of the crime imputed to him by the malice of two comrades. When she heard this, Anne Catharine, as she afterwards related, "chose this field for my nocturnal prayer, and knelt there with my arms extended in the form of a cross. The first time I had a hard struggle to keep my post ; the second time a monster in the shape of a hideous dog sprang upon me. I looked round and saw his dark muzzle and two flaming red eyes glaring over my shoulder, which terrified me exceedingly, but I would not give way, and thought to myself, 'My Lord prayed in an agony of terror, and had to recommence more than once ; He is near me now, and will not let this evil thing hurt me.' So I began to pray again, and the beast disappeared. Again I was carried away by

force, and held over the brink of a deep pit, but I put all my trust in God, and said : ‘Satan, thou hast no power over me!’ and I was left in peace. I continued my prayers more and more fervently, and from that time the hideous shadows were seen no more, and the grass began to grow as in the other fields around.”

In her confidential freedom with God she would often complain to Him about His allowing such and such a sin to exist ; she could never understand, when He held all in His hand, why sin should be ! The eternity of punishment also was incomprehensible to her, since her visions constantly taught her how undefinably loveable and merciful God is.

We come now to what we may term the second period of Anne Catharine’s childhood, beginning with her seventh year, in which she made her first confession. Hitherto we have followed her character chiefly in its supernatural aspects, and it is time to consider more in detail what that character was in itself, in its dispositions, temper, and relationships with the little world in which she dwelt. She describes herself as having been naturally quick tempered and wilful, and adds that the subduing of this self-will cost her more pain than all the rest of her internal warfare. “My parents were always scolding me for it,” she says, “till at last, as I perceived that they were perpetually finding fault with me, and never giving me one word of praise, and as I heard other children commended by their parents, I looked upon myself as the most wicked child in the whole world, and was often terribly frightened lest God should turn away from me. Once, however, I saw some other children behaving naughtily to their parents, and though I felt very grieved for their fault, it gave me fresh courage, for I thought ‘There is still hope for me with God, for I could never do a thing like that.’” Her clear, musical voice, and rapidity of

utterance betrayed her natural vivaciousness, and words would come tumbling out almost in spite of herself as to things which sounded strange and mysterious to those around her ; but no sooner did she perceive, by the severe or sneering looks which the momentary revelation of her divine gifts had brought forth, the impression she had made, than by increased simplicity and greater humility she instantly strove to efface it. She set herself so determinately to conquer her natural impetuosity and to crush her own will and inclinations in everything, that it seemed as though she lived only to do the will of others. The delicate sensibility of her whole nature, the softness of her heart (which was perpetually being wounded by a thousand circumstances unheeded by others), her burning zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of her neighbour, all combined to inspire her with so constant a spirit of self-oblivious sweetness and mildness, and such a ready obedience, that the very first symptom of opposition was quelled in her heart, before it had time to make itself heard. So thoroughly did this valiant soul gain the victory over self, that she could truthfully say "Obedience was my strength and my consolation. Through obedience I learnt how to pray joyously and freely ; I learnt how to be ever with God, and to keep my heart free and detached from aught else."

No one could help loving Anne Catharine. She was so gentle and winning and so ready and anxious to serve and assist all who came across her path, that young and old alike sought the little girl in every kind of circumstance for either advice or consolation ; there was not a sick-bed for miles round where her presence was not eagerly desired, and she herself confesses that "even as a child, all the neighbours came to me to bind up their wounds, because I had a light hand and was careful not to hurt them more than I could help.

When I first saw an ulcerated sore throat, I thought to myself, now if I press that it will make it sorer, but still the root of the evil must be got out, so at last I hit upon the plan of sucking the poisonous matter out with my lips very slowly and gently, and after that I found the wound very soon healed. No one taught me how to nurse the sick ; I learnt it from my intense desire to be of use. At first, I felt rather squeamish, but I determined at once to get over that as being a very false kind of pity, and whenever I overcame a feeling of repugnance, the joy it gave me was very sweet, for I thought of our Blessed Lord, Who healed the wounds of all mankind." The colour of her face would often fade from its glowing pink to the most ashen white, and the light fade out of her eyes, whilst a deep cloud of unmistakeable grief would settle down upon her face, causing her parents to exclaim anxiously, "What can be the matter with the child?" The cause of this sudden change would be the disclosure to her soul of some trouble or misery, which would draw her in spirit with an irresistible force to the theatre of the suffering. She felt the sorrow of others as if it were her own ; the certainty, however, that her sympathy and her offering to bear part of the pain gave relief and comfort to the sufferers, was like renewed strength and life to her, so that every day the furnace of human sympathy, as we may call it, burned more and more fiercely in her heart. Her family, however, not comprehending the wonderful operations going on within her soul, became exceedingly amazed at these wonderful changes, especially her mother, who when she found sickness and disease disappear as suddenly as they had taken the place of blooming health, imagined the poor child was either feigning, or giving way to a whimsicalness which she must cure her of by blows and punishments. Therefore when at times her little daughter, weighed down under the load of interior

anguish could scarcely stand upright, her mother would push her angrily away, or chastise her severely. Such unjust corrections were borne, however, with the greatest patience and submission by Anne Catharine, who grew more and more cheerful and contented under them, not only because the admonitions of her angel taught her to receive such treatment joyfully for Christ's sake, but also because she fully believed herself deserving of it, since she deemed herself the lowest and least of all mankind. Her angel would not admit of her retaining the smallest stain of imperfection, and punished every fault with a stern rebuke, admonishing her to perform the most painful and humiliating penances. She got into the habit of judging and correcting herself implacably for every slight omission, whilst her own heart was overflowing with loving-kindness towards the whole world. When only five years old, she one day caught sight of a round rosy apple lying on the other side of the garden hedge, and child-like, longed to eat it. No sooner had the wish crossed her mind than she conceived so deep a remorse for her momentary feeling of covetousness, that she laid upon herself a penance never to taste an apple as long as she should live, and to this resolution she adhered faithfully.

Another time she felt a dislike to a certain peasant woman whom she had heard speaking against her parents, and made up her mind to pass her for the future without addressing her. She did so once with a heavy heart, and then, stung by remorse, she hurried back, and begged the woman's pardon for her incivility. It would not have been surprising if so much early interior suffering, combined with her austere mission of expiator for the sins of others, had quenched the harmless gaiety in Anne Catharine's heart, natural to an innocent child ; but this was not the case, for God in His far-reaching providence over every minute want of His servants, ordained that she

should find her full share of pleasure in the innumerable delights she derived from the contemplation of His greatness and magnificence in the wonders of creation, and in familiar intercourse with all members of the animal kingdom. If she wandered alone through woods or meadows, she was generally accompanied by a flight of little birds, chirruping round her, perching on her shoulders, and eager for her caresses, as she joined her voice to theirs in singing God's praises, and when she had discovered a nest, her little heart beat for joy as she gazed at its tiny occupants, murmuring her most endearing words to them, whilst their mother fluttered in loving confidence round her head. She knew every spot where the first flowers of spring opened their blossoms to the light, and her delight was, to weave wreaths with them for the Child Jesus and His blessed Mother. At the age when other children enjoy picture-books and painted representations of flowers and creatures, Nature and her beauties were the books into whose pages little Anne Catharine loved to dive, ever finding new joys in her fresh discoveries of the wisdom and goodness of her God; and so learned did she become in all the mysteries of the floral world, that when speaking of St. John the Baptist's sojourn in the wilderness, she said: "It never surprised me that St. John learnt so much from the flowers and dumb animals in the wilderness, for even when I was a little child, every leaf and every flower were like an open book to me. I felt the hidden signification and loveliness of each colour, form, and variety. If ever I tried to tell other people what I knew about them, I was always laughed at, but when once I got out into the open air there was nothing created I could not converse with; I saw God in every flower and in every creature; and I cannot describe how sweet it was to talk to them

all of Him ! I had once a very bad sort of fever, and every one thought I should soon die, but I was still able to get out of doors, and one day a beautiful child came towards me and pointed to some herbs, which he told me to gather and eat, and I should get well again. I remember these plants well ; they were a sort of bind-weed filled with a delicious juice. I sat down under a hedge, and did as I was told, and soon felt quite well.

“One of my special favourites was the camomile flower ; there was something indefinably sweet and mysterious to me in its name ; I don't know what it was. I used to pick the blossoms early in a morning, so as to have them prepared for the sick people who kept coming to show me their wounds or bruises, and to ask me what I thought of them, and I used to amuse myself by discovering all kinds of simple, harmless remedies, by which the injured parts were always very soon cured.”

In her seventh year Anne Catharine went to confession for the first time, with several other children, and so overcome was she by the force of her contrition, and the anxiety and emotion she felt in approaching this holy sacrament, that her strength gave way upon the road to the church, and she had to be carried almost the whole way to Coesfeld by her little companions, who loved her as fondly as did all who knew her, and were proud to render her this little service. Besides the few faults she had committed in her childhood, and long since atoned for by many a painful self-inflicted penance, all her incessant visions weighed upon her conscience, as she had made up her mind to narrate them fully, and with every detail, to the priest, and be guided by his advice and direction upon the subject, since the constant blame she received on account of these dream-pictures from her relations, especially from her mother, who never ceased

warning her about her superstitious and visionary fancies, made her extremely uneasy, although she felt herself guiltless of sin. And here we cannot fail to admire the ways of God, who put this anxiety into the heart of the little girl, in order that she might be led thereby to place the gifts of revelation and prophecy, which had been committed to her care, into the hands of her spiritual Father, that they might serve to the edification of the whole Church, and bring about a new infusion of faith into an age wherein heresy, infidelity, and indevotion were reigning paramount in the hearts of men.

Whilst making the examination of her conscience Anne Catharine was filled with fear lest self-love or a false shame might conceal a fault from her own eyes or lend it some palliation ; therefore, she kept repeating over and over to herself : “ Whatever the devil has robbed me of, *that* he may keep ; so if he has taken away from me the shame for my sins, I will not have it back any more from his hands.” Selfishness was more terrible to her than the very devil himself ; for she had learnt in her interior contemplations that mankind would never have fallen into its present depth of degradation had not Adam laid the blame of his fall on Eve and Eve upon the serpent. She accused herself, therefore, with the deepest contrition, of many mortal sins, as she imagined, and would scarcely accept a modification of their enormity even from the mouth of her confessor himself. She remembered on one occasion having quarrelled with a child ; on a second, of having answered another mockingly ; and these were faults she was firmly convinced were mortal sins, since “ had she not heard from the schoolmaster that God commands us, *if we receive a blow to turn our other cheek to our offender ?” Her confessor, Overberg, indeed said of her that at this early period of her life she had attained to so

great a strength of soul that it was her keenest joy to be able to oblige any person from whom she had ever received an injury. Thus, when confessing these heinous crimes, as she believed them to be, she was so terrified lest her confessor should refuse her absolution that, when he sought to comfort her by saying, "My child, thou can'st not yet commit a mortal sin," she broke down into such floods of sobs and tears, that she had to be carried out of the confessional.

Her parents had given her some pence before she started, with which to buy herself a loaf of white bread, as was the children's custom after making their confessions. This time, however, she gave it to a beggar, in order that God might pardon her sins; and on future occasions bought the bread, as her parents gave her the money to do so, but carried it home to them untasted.

That her scruples did not proceed from a false species of solicitude, but were the consequence of her extreme purity of conscience, may be plainly seen from the following fact, which good Bernhard Emmerich was very fond of relating: "When Anne Catharine first began to read, she was very fond of seating herself with her prayer-book on the ground by the fire-side, and piling up splinters of wood to make a blaze. One day her father was working at a carving-block belonging to a neighbour, in which he had to insert a piece of new wood, and observing his little daughter carefully picking up all the splinters of new wood to throw into the fire, and leaving the others on the ground, he asked her why she did not take them all? to which she replied: "I only take those that are of the new wood, for the others that are chipped off from the block do not belong to us." Another of her favourite practices for some time was, when her parents had gone to sleep, to get up and read (if the fire was out) by the light of any

stray candle-ends she could find. At first she thought there was no harm in taking these candle-ends, but a little while later made it a cause of confession, and thenceforth never made use of anything belonging to her parents without first asking their permission.

CHAPTER V.

First Communion and Subsequent Trials.

FOUR years elapsed between Anne Catharine's first Confession and first Communion. As the great day approached on which she was to receive the real Body and Blood of her Lord for the first time, the burning love of her heart which had hitherto, all her life long, found its vent in communicating spiritually, knew no bounds; she felt that she could never do enough in preparation for so high an honour; the greatness of her desire for the heavenly food could only be measured by the intensity of her anxiety that her soul might be found worthy of being the habitation of her Lord. She now made a particular examination of every hour of her past life with yet greater zeal than for her first Confession, in order that no trace of sin should remain in her soul. Her fears lest self-love should have blinded her to her faults returned with tenfold force, and to them was added the further alarm lest her subsequent confessions might not have been made with all the candour and completeness required by God.

She had never lost the conviction that of all children in the world she was the naughtiest, and her humility on this point would admit of neither excuse nor mitigation. She besought her parents, with tears, to assist her in discovering all the sins that had ever stained her conscience, saying, "I will not suffer a secret nor a fold to remain in my heart. Were an angel to come to me in whom I could discern one hidden corner, I should be forced to believe that the devil had some share in him; for the enemy of souls loves to conceal himself in the nooks and secret places of our hearts." It is not to be wondered at that Anne Catharine should have approached the greatest of all Sacraments with an overwhelming sense of loving awe, since from the day of her baptism (which it will be remembered was also the day of her birth), the Blessed Sacrament had ever had so powerful an attraction for her, that when in Its vicinity, she experienced a mysterious sensation of joy and well-being physically as well as spiritually, and from that time had never entered a church without being accompanied by her guardian angel, and learning, from his worship of the Divine Goodness, the kind of reverence with which mortals should adore in His Presence. Her visions constantly instructed her in the greatness and magnificence of this mystery, and our Blessed Lord Himself did the same. The knowledge she thus gained had imbued her with so deep a veneration for the priestly offices of the Church, that nothing upon earth appeared worthy in her eyes of comparison with them. When kneeling before the Altar, she dared not in the fervour of her devotion so much as look to the right or to the left, but with eye and heart fixed upon the Holiest of Holies, the deep recollection of her soul blending with the solemn stillness of the sacred spot, she spoke with sweet and loving familiarity to the Blessed Sacrament, telling her

Lord all her wants very simply, and joining with the Church in her hymns of praise. As, however, she could not get to the church so often, or for as long a time as she could have wished, she invariably turned spontaneously, during her nocturnal prayers, towards that place which was her heaven upon earth, a church which she knew to contain the Tabernacle of her Lord.

When the day of her Communion had arrived, Anne Catharine kept her eyes shut the whole way to the church, that they might see nothing which could distract the recollection of her spirit. Her one thought, her one longing was to give herself utterly into God's hands, and to dedicate every force of her body and soul to His service. Her confessor declared that at her first communion she made very few requests. Her principal prayer was that God would make her a good child, and that she should do nothing but what He wished her to do. That the utter and perfect resignation with which Anne Catharine surrendered herself into God's hands found favour in His sight, is sufficiently proved by the marvellous results which the reception of the Blessed Eucharist produced in her heart. Divine love was thereby kindled within her into such a burning flame, that this child of twelve years old felt herself driven to embrace a life of mortification and self-renunciation, which for ingenuity of penitential austerity could not have been surpassed by all the combined wisdom of the severest orders of religious and the Anchorets of the desert. How this strange and rugged destiny was carried out, with what heroism of soul, depth of understanding, and perfect interior as well as exterior self-possession the sequel will show. She had no guide and director but the illuminations and operations of this heavenly food. All those bye-ways which serve to entice the affections of mankind towards created objects and detach their hearts from God, she put away from her at

once with a strong hand, so that God, Who had now deigned to take up His habitation within her heart, might alone rule over and possess it.

“From this day forth,” says Overberg, “the spirit for self-abnegation and self-humiliation became yet more deeply rooted in her than before, for she was firmly persuaded that without mortification no one could give himself over entirely to God ; and it was her personal love of Jesus Christ which taught her this truth.” She also often made the remark how much the mere love of creatures impelled men to undertake and persevere in difficult and laborious enterprises ; “Then why,” she would say, “should not the love of Jesus incite us to do a great deal more ?”

Anne Catharine practised mortification in all her senses. Her eyes she mortified by turning them away or lowering them if any object presented itself which could encourage curiosity or give pleasure, doing this especially in church, where she allowed them no freedom whatever, saying to herself, “Do not look at this or that, you will lose your interior recollection,” or, “you might take too much pleasure in what you see. And what good would it do you when you have looked at it ? Leave it alone, out of love to God !” In the same way, if there was anything new or amusing related in her hearing, she would stop her ears, offering the pleasure she denied herself to God. With the tongue she practised mortification, by imposing silence upon herself when there was something she particularly wished to say, and also in not eating different kinds of food which she fancied ; in which latter practice she had a double mortification, for her parents seeing her refuse to eat of this and that dish, imagined she was whimsical, and chid her sharply for being dainty. Her feet came in for their share equally ; if she felt a desire to go hither or thither, she said to herself (unless duty or

charity called her), "No, I will not go, it is better to stay away for the love of God ; if I went, I might have to repent of it hereafter ;" and she also adopted a practice, in the same intention, of making the whole of the Coesfeld stations of the cross (a long distance over a very rough road) barefooted. Her inclinations she thwarted in every possible manner, not allowing herself many a little pleasure which she might innocently have enjoyed. She contrived to punish her body also in a multitude of ways, flogging herself with nettles, and wearing pieces of knotted rope, or chains, round her waist next the skin. For a long time it was her custom to sleep upon two pieces of wood, placed across one another in the shape of a cross, that so she might never know what it was really to rest.

After receiving Holy Communion she had a vision, in which she saw herself dwelling in the catacombs, in the companionship of St. Cecilia, and assisting at the worship of God with her. "I knelt," she described it, "on the ground in a subterranean place like the inside of a mountain, amongst a great many other people. Lights were burning against the walls, and two candlesticks were lit upon a stone altar. There was a tabernacle on this altar also of stone, with a stone door. A priest said holy Mass, and the people made the responses. Towards the end of Mass he opened the tabernacle, and took out thence a chalice, which contained the Blessed Sacrament, gave the sacred particles to the people one after another, upon little white cloths, which cloths they folded carefully and laid next their hearts ; after this they all dispersed and went away." This vision seems to have been an assurance to Anne Catharine that God had heard her prayers and had accepted the offering of herself, body and soul, which she had made to Him, showing that the purity of her heart and the severity of her life made her worthy of taking place amongst that band of ancient

Christians who derived courage to face the martyr's death by a worthy reception of the Divine Eucharist, showing also that her own life was, henceforth, to be a perpetual martyrdom, the strength for enduring which she was ever to draw from the same life-giving fountain. Like St. Cecilia, she was in later times to suffer a grievous if yet an unbloody persecution for the Faith, and would have to publicly stand forth and glorify her Saviour with all the heroism of the virgin martyr of old, when innumerable tongues of men would deny and forsake Him.

The first part of the time which elapsed between each communion was devoted by Anne Catharine to thanksgiving, and the second part to preparation for her next reception of the Blessed Eucharist; she invited all the saints to assist her in praising and thanking God, and begged them to join with her in her supplications. She implored of Almighty God that He would deign Himself, by his love to Jesus and to Mary, to prepare her heart to receive His beloved Son worthily.

The second time she approached the holy table, an occurrence befel her which was apparently the symbol of her future relations with the Blessed Sacrament, and also of the graces and blessings she should draw down thence upon herself and others. Upon the occasion in question she was to set out for Coesfeld with her mother before daybreak, in order to communicate there, and, as she went to put on her best clothes (always kept in her mother's chest), she perceived in taking them out, a number of small loaves of fine white flour lying amongst the things. At first she thought her mother must have put the bread there to try her, but she soon found there was such a quantity of them that she had to unpack the whole box before she could count the loaves. Hardly had she replaced them in the chest, when her mother

came back to enquire angrily what was the cause of her delay, and hurried her so much, that she forgot to put on a neck-handkerchief. She did not notice the omission until they had got some distance along the road, when she dared not run back for it, and so followed a little way behind her mother, in terror lest the latter should turn round and discover that she was not properly dressed, and praying with all her might for assistance in the difficulty. Suddenly, as her mother was walking carefully over a slippery place in the road, and in the act of giving the child her hand to help her along, before she could look round Anne Catharine felt a handkerchief put about her neck. Joy and astonishment at this sudden answer to her prayer made her so bewildered, that she could scarcely keep pace with her mother, who, as usual, reproved her sharply for her strange behaviour. The moment she arrived at the church, she hastened weeping to make a confession of the curiosity which had led her to take the bread out of the chest, at the same time her ardent loving to receive the holy Eucharist burned within her like a furnace, and she felt an indescribable fiery glow of heat within her breast, and upon her tongue; this she thought was sent her as a punishment for being inquisitive, and she soon got so frightened at it, that she applied a little picture on parchment of the Five Wounds, which she possessed and valued very highly, to her tongue, in hopes that it would cure the burning sensation. It did so in some degree, but on going up to receive Holy Communion, she beheld the sacred particle, surrounded with what seemed to be a brilliant light, come towards her and disappear in her heart at the same moment in which she received the Blessed Sacrament upon her tongue from the hand of the priest. Then tongue and breast began to glow with a still fiercer heat than before, and this sensation remained in her mouth all the way back from the

church to Flamske. On nearing home she was filled with a new dread, for she had discovered that the handkerchief she was wearing was a great deal prettier than her own. "It has a fringe ; what will my mother say ?" she thought. The moment she reached the cottage she laid it upon her bed, in fear and trembling ; but on turning round to look at it again, to her great comfort the handkerchief had vanished, without her mother ever having perceived it.

We may interpret the allegory of the fine white loaves, which were visible to Anne Catharine only, as signifying the rich gifts which were hers in reward for her good preparation for Communion, and which she should distribute as spiritual food and drink to countless hungry and thirsty souls ; and the bread lying concealed under her clothing, may have meant gifts and graces, which being hidden within her heart, were increased a hundred-fold by her own co-operation. It seems, too, that those who were the most needy, were to receive the largest share in her bounties, namely, the holy souls in purgatory, for whom she was accustomed to give all her actions and prayers in perpetual suffrage. The gratitude of the holy souls was often evinced by their interceding on her behalf as far as lay in their power, and it was to their aid that Anne Catharine considered herself indebted for the handkerchief.

At this period her confessor was an old ex-Jesuit, Fr. Weidner, by name, of whom she once related as follows : "Fr. Weidner, my confessor, lived with his sisters in Coesfeld. On Sundays I had always to go to early Mass that I might remain at home to cook whilst the others went to High Mass. Coffee was not so generally used at that time as it is now, and therefore, if I had been able to save a couple of pieces of silver during the week, I used to run round after Mass to the sisters Weidner, who sold coffee, and have a good cup made ready for my parents when they came back from church, as a pleasant surprise.

I was very fond of going to that house, for the good old father and his two sisters led such a pious, happy life together, and were so gentle and kind to each other, it did me good to see them."

As soon as Anne Catharine had received that Bread of the strong, which, through her steady, unfaltering confidence in God, rendered her powerful enough to withstand and conquer all the attacks of the Evil One, God permitted that she should be exposed to his persecutions, for her greater perfection. There was soon not a means in his power which the devil did not employ to turn her aside from her earnest aspirations after perfection ; but all in vain : she despised alike his cunning, malice, and power, and the deeper grew her humility, the less could she comprehend how it was possible that Satan should be capable of instilling terror into a soul. Before this time his efforts to gain an entrance into her heart had been limited to disturbances during her nightly prayers—as, for instance, when she and her eldest brother, also a singularly pious child, were praying together on their knees, and with outstretched arms, beside their little beds, the room would be filled with a bright light, and Anne Catharine lifted up in the air, as her brothers several times witnessed, whilst a voice would be heard, bidding them go back to bed, which the boy, trembling with terror, obeyed, but his sister only prayed the longer, and more fervently, until the evil spirit departed in chagrin, and left them in peace.

Now, however, the devil discarded all masks, and laid in ambush for her soul behind the corporeal dangers with which he sought to terrify the child. Alluding to these occurrences, she tells us that, "when quite young, I was often in extreme peril of my life, but God always came to my assistance and rescued me ; and I was then given inwardly to understand that such dangers are never acci-

dental, but are allowed by Almighty God to overtake us for our good, at some unguarded moment in which we have not kept ourselves recollected in His presence, or have fallen into some fault through carelessness. Thus I could never believe in the theory of chance. Is not God always our shield and defence, unless we stray from His side? His angels are ever near us, ever ready to watch over and protect us, if we prove ourselves worthy of their care. The devil is equally on the look-out for our souls; his emissaries are unceasingly beside us, spying and listening to all we say, do, or think, that they may bring about our ruin; and, therefore, if they gain any power over us and work us any ill, it is because we have not sufficiently trusted in God our Father, not sufficiently implored His protection, not shown ourselves to be sufficiently grateful children to such a loving Parent.

“The first instance of the devil’s temptations I recollect was one day that my father and mother were out, and had left me in charge of the house, bidding me not to leave it. When they were out of sight an old woman came in, and, whether out of curiosity, or in order to do something behind my back which she should not have done, I know not, she said, ‘Run across into the garden and fetch some pears; quick, before your mother returns!’ I fell into the temptation, forgot my mother’s injunctions, and ran with such haste into the woman’s garden that I stumbled up against a plough that was hidden under some straw, and fell senseless to the ground. In this state my mother found me, and brought me to my senses again by a sound whipping; but I felt the pain of the blow on my chest for weeks; and some time after I was taught that the devil had made use of that old woman’s bad disposition to tempt me into an act of disobedience by means of the greediness of my nature, and thereby to place my life in imminent peril. This event impressed upon my mind

more deeply than ever the necessity for mankind to learn how to mortify themselves in their appetites and inclinations."

The devil's fury was specially excited by the sight of Anne Catharine's unintermitting nightly prayer. He sought to turn her from it by terrifying noises, apparitions, and even by personal violence. She sometimes felt herself seized by the feet with icy hands, hurled to the ground or lifted up to an alarming height. Although this treatment would cause her an involuntarily feeling of very natural terror, she never for all that lost her composure, but prayed the more vigorously, until she had conquered her enemy, and then returned to the same spot where he had just maltreated her, saying, "Thou wretched one, thou shalt not drive me away! Thou hast no part in me!" These interruptions occurred the most frequently when Anne Catharine was praying for the holy souls, or when she performed an act of penance; but as she was never without interior direction as to how she should encounter the devil, and was generally surrounded visibly by her beloved souls, who overwhelmed her with words of thanks for the consolation accruing to them through her assistance, every attack from the Evil One served only to redouble her courage and exertions.

The old cross erected in a field on the top of a high hill has been alluded to before as a favourite place for the child's midnight prayer, and the way to this hill led along an extremely narrow path. In the middle of this path she often found a horrible animal with a huge head, somewhat resembling a dog, confronting her. At first she trembled with fright, and turned back a few steps; but recollecting herself, she made the sign of the Cross, and walked on boldly towards the monster, though her hair stood on end with terror. She flew rather than walked towards the old cross, the beast running by her side and

occasionally making a snap at her. By degrees she overcame all fear at him, and drove him away by the fervour of her prayers. Another night, in the same spot, the devil, finding it impossible to shake her firmness through fright, incited a bad man to lie in wait for her beside the cross. He, however, was equally powerless against her, and Anne Catharine, with the aid of her good angel, speedily drove him away out of her sight. Sometimes also the devil tried to kill her by flinging her into a pit, into a bog, or into a deep pond, holding her under water in hopes of suffocating her ; but her angel invariably came to the rescue, and landed her safely upon the edge.

These diabolical persecutions contain a deeper meaning than we should be tempted to suppose at first sight ; for we see therein not only the rage and malice invariably displayed by the citizens of hell against one of God's chosen instruments, but also the accomplishment of Anne Catharine's earthly mission—namely, of drawing the whole fury of hell upon herself, and thus warding it off from others whose guilt had exposed them thereto. She stood in the stead of all criminals, of all who were in peril, all who were weak and wretched, or who would have been lost, had not some innocent person suffered and striven in their behalf. Just as she took the bodily maladies of weeping children upon herself, that they might be cured, so in the same way she stood forth to receive the whole rage of the devils, that she might bring salvation to many in peril of their souls : and all this, not merely of her own free will, but by the direction of her angel or the interior commands received in her visions.

Thus she would one night make the Way of the Cross upon her knees to atone for the heedlessness of some sleepy-headed, lazy shepherd, who had permitted a wolf to steal into his flock, and would take upon herself the struggle with the animal to save the lives of the poor

harmless sheep. Another time, when cast into a deep pond, she would be expiating a mortal sin, and robbing hell of an otherwise sure prey ; and at others, when her whole soul was filled with an agony of terror at the horrible forms and terrifying pictures the Evil One thrust before her eyes, she would be soothing the last moments of a dying person by thus removing the horror with which the devil sought to distract him in his agony.

Satan's onslaughts became the more relentless when Anne Catharine had hindered the commission of some sin upon which he had made sure, by disconcerting his plans and ruining his plottings. "Once," she says, "I was going to church before it was light, and a form like that of a dog brushed past me, and as I held out my hand to protect myself, it gave me such a blow in the face that I was knocked quite off the path-way. Whilst I was in church my face, where I had been struck, and my hand, swelled enormously, and broke out in blisters, so that by the time I got home I was quite unrecognizable, until I had washed them well with holy water. Our way to the church led across a paling, which I was obliged to climb over ; and one St. Francis's day, very early in the morning, as I came to this place, I felt some great black object trying to pull me down again. I fought with this thing until it let me go ; but I felt no fear of it, and since that I have constantly found it in my way, trying to trip me up, but it has never yet succeeded."

The devil also sometimes tried insidious intellectual methods of temptation upon Anne Catharine, as he found other assaults to be an utter failure, whispering suggestions in her ear that she should mitigate the austerity of her life, or practise less mortification. As soon, however, as she had discovered his artifices, she redoubled her severities. Then he laid a new snare for her, urging her on to an excess of strictness, upon which she grew more

cautious, and sought the advice of her director. From this time forward to the end of her life there was not a stone which Satan left untried to seduce her from her allegiance to God ; yet never once did his machinations succeed in sullyng by so much as one thought the unclouded purity of a soul which God had given in especial charge to one of His own angels, and whom He led by a path too rugged and too steep to admit of the slightest breath of concupiscence finding an entrance therein.

CHAPTER VI.

Anne Catharine and her Guardian Angel.

ANNE CATHARINE does not stand alone in her wonderful intercourse with one of God's holy angels, for it is a well-known fact that many chosen souls who have been called upon to tread extraordinary paths of perfection, and gifted with supernatural knowledge by means of visions, have been made conscious of the visible companionship of an angel as their director and guide, who steered them safely through the innumerable dangers inseparable from so high a calling, and preserved in them the requisite purity of soul. We are all, from the hour of our birth, accompanied by a guardian angel, who inspires us with the wish and power to fulfil those designs which God's providence has allotted to us and who enlightens us, strengthens our faith, and encourages our good impulses, accordingly as he sees us aspiring with greater or less fervour to the securing of our everlasting felicity as God's faithful children : and

the purer the soul, the keener its perceptions, and the higher the state of grace which it enjoys, so much the greater delight does its heavenly guardian take in its culture and adornment. No sight is so pleasing in the eyes of the holy angels as that of unsullied baptismal innocence, and it was the brilliancy of this indescribable beauty in Anne Catharine, which made her worthy of being the delight of her angelical companion, who, although he belonged to one of the highest of the nine Choirs, considered that his dignity was enhanced by his appointment as guardian to a being, who, too young as yet to understand the ways and doings of the world, was already ripe and prepared by her miraculous virtues for the comprehension of the mysteries of God, and for the fulfilment of His designs in those high and holy things which concern eternity and the salvation of mankind.

The first illuminations which he gave her were on the subject of faith and doctrine. He showed her pictures connected with the high and hidden significations of Catholic belief which impressed all the depth of its mysteries upon her soul with great clearness, and then she worked them out and subsequently corroborated them from her own meditations and the ordinary catechetical instructions she received. At the same time, he so interwove the practice of Divine Love with all his teachings, that Anne Catharine's soul was soon bound up in such a close union with God, that it became natural to her to seek God in all things, to refer everything to God, and to look at all things from God's point of view. The splendour of the angel, whose light shone round about her like that of the sun, from the day of her birth, was to her as the atmosphere in which she breathed, and drew her eyes away from the contemplation of those earthly charms and perishable possessions which occupy and distract the hearts of men in general, until her soul became so strong in love to God, that no created

object had power to move her to the right or to the left away from Him, or engross her thoughts for one single moment. Every look of her angel which met her gaze was as a ray of light, or a kindling breath which renewed the fire of her love, and urged her on to do more and more and more for her Lord's sake. All her strength, and all the impulses of her heart, were regulated by love, and were so peacefully ordered, that no suggestions of passion or exterior disturbance had power to affect them in the least degree, or bring them into confusion. In spite of Anne Catharine's sympathetic soft-heartedness, and the natural timidity of a delicate child, the greatness of her soul possessed a strength which speedily overcame the most agitating sensations of terror, anxiety or grief, and was sustained by the early mortifications and bodily sufferings which she had brought herself quietly, simply, and persistently to endure. This greatness of heart the angel strengthened ever day by day, permitting nothing of earth to dim its brightness, no created fetter to bind its freedom or restrict its elasticity, that Anne Catharine might go on from strength to strength in the fulfilment of her heroic works of atonement and charity for her fellow creatures. She was aware that her whole being lay open to the gaze of her heavenly guardian, that he penetrated the deepest recesses of her heart, and therefore her unintermitting endeavour was to maintain the mirror of her soul as clear and undimmed as he desired to see it; and hence the cause of her retaining the indescribable simplicity, innocence, and naïve candour of a child until the day of her death. Did nothing else testify in her favour, her humble childlike openness would be sufficient proof that she was guided by the spirit of truth, and that the extraordinary wisdom with which she was gifted came direct from God; for rarely has the gift of visions been accompanied with so deep a humility in the case of

Anne Catharine, who so carefully concealed the wealth of Divine favours which God showered upon her, that she never once dreamt that there was anything wonderful about herself, and was always filled with a profound sense of her unworthiness. Such a frame of mind is neither an effect of nature, nor an instigation of the devil, but the unmistakeable consequence of a high state of grace and an extraordinary correspondence therewith.

The guidance of the angel was sent to Anne Catharine as a gift, whose fruit increased according to the use she made of it. Therefore, the greater were her endeavours to render herself worthy of so great a blessing, the greater inundation of light and grace she received from him, and the closer grew the links that united her to him; links that had their beginning and their end in a loving obedience to God. From her babyhood Anne Catharine had offered herself as a living holocaust to God, to work for Him, and to serve His creatures. This offering He was graciously pleased to accept, and therefore He sent His angel to mould her whole life, in its least as well as its greatest points, in perfect conformity with His will, so that obedience should be her watchword and the main-spring of her existence. Thus, therefore, she submitted her will to him to be governed, her mind to be illuminated, her heart, that by his directions in mortification and penance, it might be completely detached from creatures; and her body in the deprivation of rest and food, and in the taking upon herself the illnesses and sufferings of others. So faithful was she to these heavenly inspirations, that an untold flood of supernatural divine blessings and consolations were poured upon her, in compensation for her earthly deprivations and the loss of bodily comforts, health, and strength, which she endured. This love was the origin of her thirst for expiation, and led her to bear the woes of those who were not strong

enough to carry their own burthen. Wherever her assistance was most needed, there her angel took her : to the bedside of the sick, to those in affliction, sin, or want, wherever aid was required, physical or spiritual, there was she ever to be found, with her heavenly guide, shedding a consoling, refreshing, vivifying, hallowing influence around her, out of the depths of her endless sympathy with mankind ; and as true sympathy knows no limits and no reticences, so nothing could hinder the joyful ardour with which she obeyed these behests of her spiritual guide. When once questioned upon the subject, she related, "The angel calls me, and leads me hither and thither. Very often we make long journeys together. Sometimes he takes me to visit people I am acquainted with, or have perhaps seen once, but oftener to others totally unknown to me.

"Even across the sea I have been led, but it was done as quick as thought. He it was who took me to visit the poor Queen of France in her prison. When he comes to fetch me, I first of all behold a brilliant light, and then his form rises suddenly out of the darkness. It is always during the night that we travel. After passing through these regions that I know so well, we come to others far, very far off, sometimes along streets, sometimes straight across the open country, by mountain passes, plains, rivers, and the ocean itself, the whole way on foot. The steep hills I must sometimes climb on my hands and knees, which are often very sore and aching afterwards, and my feet bruised and burning, as I always go bare-footed. Sometimes my guide goes on in front of me, and sometimes by my side. I never see that he moves his feet ; he glides along very silently, hardly ever speaking, making a sign generally either with his head or his hands, in answer to my questions. In appearance he is quite transparent and radiant with light, his countenance beam-

ing with love, and a sweet, solemn gravity ; his hair is smooth, flowing and shining, his head is uncovered, and he wears a long white robe something like a priest's alb. I talk to him quite boldly, but can never look him direct in the face, awe keeps me so bowed down before him ; he teaches me everything, and I ask very few questions. I feel too overwhelmingly happy at being in his presence ; and what he tells me he puts in the fewest possible words. When I am praying for other people, and he is not beside me, I call him and beseech him to go and speak to their guardian angels, saying to him, 'Now I will remain here ; do thou go and comfort those poor things ;' and he invariably goes at my request. If we come to a great sheet of water on some of our journeyings, and I am in dismay how to get over, I find myself suddenly on the other side without knowing how I got there. Often in winter time when I was returning from the Jesuit's church in Coesfeld late in the evening, with pelting rain or snow driving in my face, I grew very frightened, and prayed to God to help me ; and then I used to find myself enveloped in a brilliant light, which had the shape of my angel in a priest's robe, the ground dried instantaneously under my feet, and the rain and the snow fell outside of this light, without a drop touching me, and thus I arrived dry and safe at home."

Anne Catharine's mission to the souls in purgatory was also under the care of the angel, who conducted her through the fiery realms in search of the souls whom she was to aid and console by the fruits of her innocent acts of penance. "We often used to descend into purgatory together," she says, "where I witnessed the misery of the poor dear souls detained there, saw how helpless they were, and how sadly they were neglected and forgotten by people on earth. Ah ! their distress is indeed beyond description. Once, whilst I was absorbed in gazing upon

so much woe, I found myself suddenly separated from my conductor by a mountain, which caused me such an intense feeling of hunger and thirst after him, that I almost lost consciousness ; I could see through the mountain, but could not get to him, and then he said to me : “ Now you know what these poor souls feel, for as you long after me, so do they long incessantly for consolatory assistance.” He would often lead me outside caves and dungeons, and bid me pray without intermission for the poor imprisoned souls, and offer up for them all my privations and satisfactions, for as he said, they could do nothing for themselves ; the blessed in heaven could no longer merit for them, and they were cruelly forgotten by men ; then I prostrated myself on the ground beside these gloomy abodes, and wept and cried out to God with outstretched hands until He had mercy on them. The poor souls know that not a single good thought or earnest wish breathed forth to God by the living is without effect, and yet how few people think of this ! A priest who says his office devoutly, and prays with the intention of shortening the purgatory of some soul, may be the means of sending untold relief and refreshment into that sad region. Yes, indeed ! the priestly blessing extends its power even into purgatory, where it falls like a heavenly dew ; and oh ! what a sight is the release of a soul ! I saw several set free on one of these journeys with my angel. Their joy was indescribable ! As they arose from the scene of their imprisonment, their grey, indistinct forms were gradually invested with the likeness of their earthly bodies, only these were far brighter and more beautiful than anything earthly ; and they all rested for awhile in a spot which seemed to be entirely surrounded by thorns, like the shape of our Lord’s crown of thorns, and here I lost sight of them. There are other souls who are neither in purgatory nor in

heaven, but who are condemned to flit mournfully upon the earth, and are ever seeking in vain to do that which they left undone when living. These souls hover about desolate places, graveyards, ruins, and the spots in which they committed misdeeds, and are what are commonly called ghosts. Others again, whose punishment is light, remain in church about the altars and tabernacles, and oh ! how they thirst for the prayers that will set them free, as they watch so many persons on their knees from day to day.

“Often I sent my guardian angel to the angels of such persons as I saw suffering in the world, that they might persuade them to offer up their pains for the poor souls. Whatever anybody does for them, whether by prayer or by suffering, gives them instant relief, and then they are so joyful and so thankful : if people only knew ! Whenever I offer any pain I have to bear for them, they always pray for me. I am filled with terror when I think of the appalling contempt and misuse of the Church’s treasures, made by those to whom they are offered in such profusion, whilst these poor dear souls pine and thirst, and are consumed with longing for them !”

In one of these journeys to Palestine, Anne Catharine was accompanied by Our Blessed Lady as a child, as well as by her angel : “We were like two people really walking,” she says, “I asked her questions on the way, and she replied to them. I said to her, How is it that almost every night I have to make long journeys to distant places, where there is work for me to do, and all seems so natural and real ; like at this moment I am with you walking in Palestine, and yet at the same time I am in my bed at home, ill and suffering ?” Then Mary answered, “All that you really desire to do and to suffer for my Son, from the bottom of your heart, for His church and for your neighbour, you do really and truly in prayer ;

you can see how for yourself." She told me also that her beloved Son was always quite close to us.

Another time Anne Catharine had to hinder a sacrilegious robbery, and to drive the thieves from a mortuary-chapel outside the church, into which they had crept. At the moment she entered this chapel in spirit, a violent fit of coughing seized her in bed, on account, as she afterwards explained, of some bad tobacco the robbers were smoking. Another time she began to cough violently, and explained that she had to travel so rapidly, and through so many different climates, that the current of air affected her seriously. This was not the only occasion on which she suffered physically from her mystical travels, as has been before mentioned ; her feet were often torn and bruised, as she lay in her bed, from the rocky paths she had climbed, and in one of her visits to Jerusalem, where she was dragged at full speed through the uneven streets, she fell and injured one of her kneecaps severely, and was unable to walk with ease for some weeks afterwards.

There was no circumstance throughout her life for which Anne Catharine was not carefully prepared by her angel ; he showed her in visions of the future the sorrows there in store for her, so that they might not take her by surprise ; and he unfolded her whole life to her step by step, that she might be provided against all the manifold emergencies of this changeful world, and do nothing with which her conscience might hereafter have to reproach her, also that she might have time to gain the strength needful to bear her up in her path of toil, warfare, and suffering. Thus he put before her, distinctly and in detail, every important event, every meeting with fresh persons, every misfortune which should happen to herself, or to those with whom she was connected ; he also gave her clear and definite instructions how she should act towards

certain persons ; whether she should be intimate with them, or have very little to do with them ; and on certain occasions, when requisite, he went so far as to write down the words which she was to say. His care extended, moreover, to all her daily avocations, such as household and needlework, or the cooking. As she lived, so to say, in two worlds, the material as well as the supernatural, she had to work as unceasingly for the one as for the other. Her mission sent her from Almighty God required of her nothing short of perfection in the ordinary duties of daily life, befitting her condition, which she indeed fulfilled under an amount of weakness and suffering, which, with many persons, would have sufficed to absorb their whole lives, to the exclusion of aught else. Added to this days and weeks often passed when she was so entirely rapt in visions, which embraced the whole range of Christianity, every phase of belief in the world, and every vicissitude of the Church, as to be entirely dead to all that occurred around, and how could she then have maintained her usual demeanour, and taken her share (always an arduous one) of household labour, unless she had been assisted by angelic guidance, and supernaturally enabled to blend these two widely different existences into a harmonious unison ?

The angel was her only spiritual guide during those years wherein she was not under the immediate direction of the church—but when once she had received the Holy Eucharist and placed herself under the direction of a confessor, to whose words she listened with the same reverence and submission she had always had for her heavenly teacher, she perceived that the angel himself submitted, as it were, his direction to that of God's priest ; taking the place of protector and guard over the supernatural treasures and gifts with which the soul of his charge was adorned for the good of the faithful, and leaving to the Church herself,

through the medium of her priesthood, the spiritual direction of a soul destined to work out her salvation through those channels which God has left open to all comers, whether the ignorant or the learned, the peasant, or the prince, the ordinary Christian, or the gifted extatica. As her life, with its wonderful gifts of grace unfolds itself before us, we shall find with amazement what a mighty power the priestly office exercised over Anne Catharine and her gifts themselves, and how even her angel was pleased to manifest himself as standing under the command and might of the Church. He it was who when, in later years she would be so entirely absorbed in her heavenly contemplations as to be dead to all earthly impressions, and her spirit was far away in distant lands, awakened her soul, and brought her back into her natural state at the instant she received the command of her ecclesiastical superior. She herself relates, that when entirely absorbed in some vision or spiritual toil, which had been entrusted to her care, she would be called back suddenly into this dismal world by the force of some holy revered power, hearing the word "obedience," whispered in her ear; "a word," she says, "which often carries a sound of pain along with it, but which is yet the life and the root of the whole tree of supernatural vision!" Thus, whilst the angel left nothing undone which might prepare his charge for being a channel of blessings to the whole Church, he took care that these blessings should flow into the Church by the Church: in other words, by the hands of her priesthood.

CHAPTER VII.

Anne Catharine desires to be a Religious.

It is not surprising that as this miraculously gifted soul grew in years, the desire of living for God alone became mightier in her soul and more engrossing day by day ; and that she was perpetually occupied with thinking over ways and means by which she might accomplish this work. For a long time she cherished the idea of secretly leaving her parent's house and seeking some distant place, where she would be unknown, and could lead a life of penance. After God Himself, her parents and brothers and sisters were the only beings to whom she clung with tender love, and therefore she imagined that her fidelity to Him was incomplete so long as she remained at home. This project she found impossible of execution ; but her longing to lead a hidden contemplative life increased in intensity, till it became the one end and aim of all her earthly wishes. Her affection towards all religious orders was so great, that, as she often related later, she knew not how to contain her emotion if she caught sight of the habit of a member of one of the austere orders, but she hardly dared allow herself to contemplate the possibility of ever being clothed in such a garment herself. God, Who had implanted this desire in her heart, deigned at this period to become her guide and to assist her in attaining her coveted end. This guidance is all the more remarkable a fact, both from Anne Catharine's

own character and the position of the Church at that date ; for therein we discern one of the mysterious ways by which God comes to the aid of His Church in all her needs and difficulties, as also the unmistakeable proof that His all-powerful wisdom is ever at her side when her enemies are most numerous and combined together for her overthrow. At the time when Anne Catharine was called to the religious life armed and prepared by Divine foresight for a life of, as seemed probable, unusual activity, events were already threatening, and indeed had partially commenced, which in a few short years were to lay waste the vineyard of the Church. Thus Anne Catharine was not called upon, like the Blessed Colette and others to re-establish conventual discipline, and found new communities, but a far harder work fell to her share, that of giving herself as an expiatory sacrifice to God, upon whom He, as formerly in the case of Lidwina of Schiedam, in equally terrible times, laid the atonement for all the Church's wounds and sufferings, and all the guilt of the crimes committed against her, in order to bring her renewed health and safety.

This immeasurable, all-embracing mission of suffering, God entrusted to a humble child, condescending to woo her as a bridegroom his bride, and to elevate her by the wooing to the highest steps in the ladder of spiritual perfection. Never had the Church been more deeply bowed down into the dust ; never had the pestilential breath of unbelief worked more universal devastation, or the enemies of the faith made more inordinate efforts to bring about her ruin, and never had a more feeble resistance been offered to their attacks, than at the time when God chose Anne Catharine as His bride.

And now a poor sickly child was to encounter and defeat this array of hostile forces. Poor and feeble the

instrument indeed was, but the weapons with which her heavenly Bridegroom armed her, were strong and mighty, they were the same with which He Himself in His Most Sacred Humanity overcame the powers of hell ; and step by step He trained her in those tactics upon which victory can never fail to ensue ; ways which perhaps are not according to human wisdom and reckoning, but which accord with the decrees of His inscrutable wisdom.

The more powerfully Anne Catharine was strengthened in spirit by this tuition, the farther reached the circle of her blessed interposition, until finally it embraced all parts and ordinances of the entire Church.

It was in either her fifth or sixth year that she received the distinct call from God to the religious life. "I was a very little girl," she tells us, "employed in minding cows—always a most laborious and difficult task to me—when the wish arose in my heart to run away from cows and home and go to some place far away, where I could serve God in solitude without anyone's knowing me. Whilst so thinking, I fell into a vision and found myself on the road to Jerusalem. Suddenly a nun came to meet me, whom I afterwards discovered to be Jeanne de Valois ; she was very grave, and was accompanied by a wonderfully beautiful boy of just about my own size. She did not lead him by the hand, so I knew he was not her son. She asked me what I was fretting about, and when I had told her my trouble, she comforted me and said : 'Have no fears ! Look at this little boy ! will you have him for your bridegroom ?' I said, 'Yes, I will,' and she bade me be contented and wait patiently till he should come and fetch me ; and that I should be a nun. This appeared to me quite impossible, but she assured me I should go into a convent, for all things were possible to my bridegroom. Then I felt quite happy and sure it

would be so. When I awoke again, I was driving the cows quietly homewards. The vision came over me in full mid-day. I was never disturbed by such visions, for I thought everyone else had the same intercourse with the spiritual world as myself." Another similar vision was granted her some time later, which so encouraged her that she ventured to make a vow that she would follow the call of her Divine Bridegroom when old enough, and enter a convent. She thus describes the occurrence : " My father had made a vow, to present a fatted calf once a year to the Convent of the Annunciation at Coesfeld, and used always to take me with him when he gave it. The nuns used to be very fond of playing with me ; they would lift me up into the broad window-seat of the parlour, with my face towards them, and give me little presents, and then turning me round with my back to the Convent, ask me in fun whether I would not stay with them ? I always said ' Yes,' and did not want to go away again. Then they used to say that the next time I came they would keep me. Little as I was, I loved that convent dearly. Whenever I could hear the bells of their church, I used to pray with the intention of uniting my devotion with that of its pious inmates, and of becoming in some sort a member of the Community. One very hot summer's day, about two o'clock, I was with my cows, when all on a sudden the sky clouded over, and a violent thunder-storm began. With the first claps of thunder the cows showed signs of growing wild and unmanageable, they had been fidgetty all day owing to the sultriness and the flies, and I was in the greatest trouble to know what I should do with them, for I had the cows of the whole village to look after, and what could I, a weak child, do if they got off into the forest ? The rule of the place was that according to the number of cows each person had, so many days must he mind the entire herd. When it

was my turn I used to spend the time between prayer and visions ; generally betaking myself either to Bethlehem or Jerusalem.

“Thus, when the storm broke over my head in all its fury, I crouched down behind a sand-hill covered with juniper trees, which made a kind of shelter, and there I prayed and was soon absorbed in a dream-picture. An aged nun clothed in the habit of the Annunciation Convent came and talked to me. She told me that if we really wished to love and honour the Blessed Mother of God, we did not prove it by decorating her image and carrying it in procession, or saying long prayers to her, unless we added thereto the imitation of her virtues, especially those of humility, love, and purity. She also said that there was no better shelter in times of storm and danger than in the Wounds of Jesus, adding that her special devotion had always been to them, in consequence of which she had been permitted to feel what their pain was like, a grace never before conferred on man. She told me how she always wore a hair-shirt with five nails upon her breast, and a chain round her loins, and that she had always kept this pious practice a secret.

“She related also what a great devotion she had always felt towards the mystery of the Annunciation, and that it was disclosed to her that Mary, from her earliest childhood, had always looked forward with longing to the arrival of the Messiah, and wished that she herself might act as servant to the Mother of her Lord. She related also the manner in which she beheld the archangel make his wonderful announcement, and then I confided to her how I had seen the same event, and thus we became real good friends. At about four o'clock I woke up. The convent bell was ringing for prayers, the storm over, and my cows quietly grazing round me, without so much as a hair wet upon them ! I made a vow upon the spot to be

a nun, and thought at first of going into the Convent of the Annunciation, but then decided I had rather go quite away from my own family, but I did not breathe a word about this resolve to anyone. Some time later I was interiorly informed that my friend on this occasion was Jeanne de Valois, and that she had been compelled to marry. I often saw her after that, especially when I was journeying in spirit to Bethlehem and Jerusalem, sometimes alone and sometimes in the company of Francisca and Ludovica."

From this date Anne Catharine made a firm determination to enter a convent. She saw no human possibility of accomplishing it, and knew of no convent where she was the least likely to be received; but her vow had taken so deep a root in her soul, that she felt in her deep confidence in God's power the irresistible conviction that He would find means to complete the work His guidance had begun. And therefore she, even at this early period, bent all her efforts to lead as far as she knew how, and as far as her outward circumstances would permit, the life of a religious. Her parents and elders she represented to herself as her spiritual superiors, to whom she rendered the most punctilious obedience, and practised all conventual discipline, mortification, self-denial, and seclusion to the letter, as taught by her interior knowledge.

One of her playfellows, in giving her testimony about Anne Catherine many years afterwards, before the ecclesiastical authorities, said: "I have known Anne Catharine Emmerich ever since her childhood. We grew up together, and lived almost under the same roof. She was kept in very strict order by her parents, but was not unkindly treated. Hers was a thoroughly good disposition. She was tenderly affectionate to parents, and brothers, and sisters alike—always modest and well-behaved. Even as a child, her great wish was to be a nun; and all her

thoughts were of church-going and religious things, instead of games and merry-making, from which she always stole away if she could to get to church instead. She was exceedingly pious in a very quiet way, and said very few words at any time, being always occupied and industrious. She was amiable and unselfish towards everybody, and got many a present from people for her ready helpfulness. Her heart was warmth itself, if her head were sometimes a little hot, and her sorrow, if she had been hasty, knew no bounds. In her dress she was always neat and clean, and did not know the meaning of the word vanity."

When twelve years old Anne Catharine was sent by her parents as servant-girl to some relations, whose name was Emmerich also, and who were well-to-do farmers, her parents being under the impression that if the child were brought into contact with a greater number of people she would by degrees lose her strange, silent, shy ways. This mysterious child-life, so detached from creatures and worldly objects, and so entirely wrapped up in God, became daily more and more of a riddle to these simple folk, when they were perpetually receiving new proofs of her vivacious, active disposition, and of her cleverness and good sense, and they feared lest her great love of retirement should be a hindrance to her worldly prospects in after years. This would-be wisdom on the part of her parents, however, utterly failed in its ends, for no matter with whom Anne Catharine lived, with how many people she might be surrounded, whether working in solitude or toiling in the fields in company with others, she was always the same, her inclination for seclusion and silence growing stronger with her increasing years. If the general conversation turned upon spiritual things, she would put in a few words now and again without looking up from her employment, which seemed to be done by magic under her skilful, ever-busy fingers. If suddenly ad-

dressed, however, it often happened that she did not hear, or else gave an answer that had nothing to do with the subject, like a person awaking out of a dream, and would gaze at her interlocutor with wide-opened eyes, whose depths betrayed to even those simple folk that her mind was far from earthly concerns ; yet almost before they had time to know what to make of her strange look, her touching amiability, and eagerness to be of use, made the startling impression vanish from their minds.

The farmer's wife, with whom she lived for three years, spoke of her as "a quiet, gentle little girl, who lived in our household and took care of the cows. No one had a fault to find with her, she was so industrious and obliging, and we all grew very fond of her. She never joined in any village sports, but always went to church instead, for she was truly pious, and of very quiet, shy habits. She was extremely good-natured, spoke well of everyone, and could not bear to be praised herself. She fasted a great deal, under the excuse that eating did not agree with her, and wore a coarse woollen shift next her skin. When I used to try and persuade her against her project of becoming a nun, saying she would have to part from all her relations, she would shake her head at me, and say: 'You must not talk like that, or else we cannot remain friends. I must and will be a nun.'"

After these three years it was thought better for her delicate health that Anne Catharine should be apprenticed to a dressmaker ; but before putting this new plan into execution, her parents sent for her home to assist in field-work for a short time. During these few weeks an event occurred which gave Anne Catharine a good pretext for announcing to her parents her firm and irrevocable determination of going into a convent.

About three o'clock one afternoon, as they were all out at work together, father and mother, brothers and sisters,

the convent bell at Coesfeld began to ring as usual for Vespers. Often as she had heard it before, when the wind was in a favourable direction, on this occasion the sound filled her heart with such a marvellous longing for the convent that she was on the point of fainting. It seemed to her as though a voice kept crying out to her : "Go into the convent, let happen what may !" She could work no more that afternoon, and had to be taken home. "From this moment," she says, "I fell ill, was perpetually sick, and felt very depressed. Seeing me always moping about in this sorrowful frame of mind, my mother asked me what was the matter, and what I was brooding over? So I told her that I wished to be a nun. She was very angry, and asked me how could I ever expect to get into a convent, poor and sickly as I was? She complained bitterly to my father, and they both tried all they could to dissuade me from the idea, depicting the religious life itself as most unsuited to me, who would be sure to be despised as a poor peasant child. However, I replied : 'Although I possess nothing, God is infinitely rich. He will bring it about for me.' This opposition from my parents went so deeply to my heart, that I sickened more and more, and finally had to take to my bed. One afternoon during this illness, when the sun was shining brightly through the window of my little bedroom, I saw two nuns and a very saintly-looking man come to my bedside. They were all bright and shining, and brought me a great book like a Missal, saying : 'If you study these pages, you will know what is required in a religious.'

"I took the book upon my knee, promising to read it. It was in Latin, but I understood every word. They left it with me, and vanished. The leaves of the book were parchment, filled with writing in red and gold letters, and pictures of saints of the olden times. The binding was

yellow, and there were no clasps. I still had this book in my possession when I went into the convent. Once I had laid it down upon a table, and some nuns went in and tried to take it away, but they could not move it from its place. I often heard a voice say to me, 'Now thou must read such and such a page,' and as soon as I had finished one portion it immediately disappeared. I saw this book once in a place where I was carried in spirit, amongst a number of the prophetical writings of all countries and ages, and was given to understand that in it I beheld my own share of those treasures."

This mysterious volume was not a mere allegory, but was a true record of prophetical knowledge, comprised under the form of a book, and treated of the foundation and ulterior meaning of all religious orders, and the position they have held with respect to the Church in all ages, together with their future mission therein. Its perusal was like a series of pictures to Anne Catharine's mind, unfolded by the words before her eyes, as was invariably the case with all reading to her; for instance, in a psalm, in the Magnificat, or the Benedictus, in the first chapter of St. John's Gospel, in one of the Church's prayers, or in the Litany of Loreto, the words opened themselves before her mind like the husk of a seed, displaying the manifold historical references and hidden meanings to her gaze. In this volume she saw that the aim and mission of all religious orders was the soul's espousals with the Heavenly Bridegroom; but besides this general view she saw her own especial share in this, and the ways and means, the obstacles and the aids, the labours, fatigues, the self-annihilation, immolation, and sufferings, which stood before her in her path towards the attainment of her end, and this not merely in regard of her own salvation, but also with reference to the situation and necessities of the Church herself, since she had received the grace of so

high a vocation, not for her own personal perfection alone, but also because she was destined to be an instrument in the hands of the Eternal Father, Who, by means of the graces given to her, and their consequent operations, intended to save the Church in a period of universal apostacy and oppression. Hence all the teaching which Anne Catharine drew from this volume, and put into practice according to the directions it contained, turned incessantly upon self-sacrifice, atonement, expiation, and satisfaction for the guilt of others. The works that she did to relieve her neighbour's infirmities, whether spiritual or physical, might be likened to a seed sown in tears, conflicts, anguish, and blood, whose flower was to bloom for the Heavenly Bridegroom alone, and whose fruits were to be dispensed for the nourishment and refreshment of the entire Church.

The deeper Anne Catharine dived into the treasures of this book, the richer grew her contemplations, and the more varied and beautiful her outward as well as inner life. From time to time she was allegorically shown portions of her future life in pictures, which were invariably fulfilled, yet not blindly, nor without constant exertion, prayer, and toil, on her own part, the obstacles to their fulfilment which her own fault or negligence might create being held before her eyes in warning. Thus they were rather in the form of parables, strengthening and enlightening her how to do right and keep clear of wrong, or else how to avoid some imminent danger by the exercise of her own energy and will; how to cure herself of her faults, and make good her shortcomings; putting before her also many human wants and requests for aid, which she could not have foreseen naturally, and directing her how to correspond to them, either by prayer or by manual relief. All the works and undertakings which Anne Catharine was called upon to fulfil and bring to

perfection, were given her, in the express view of preparing her to become the Bride of the King's Son.

Even as carefully as a wise, anxious mother would bring up and educate a daughter who was about to become the consort of a prince of this world, was Anne Catharine supernaturally trained for her exalted destiny. In these visions she had to make all the ordinary arrangements attending an earthly marriage, and provide for all the necessities of a bride elect, but with a far higher and deeper significance. Thus she began at the very beginning ; she tilled the ground, then sowed the flax, gathered it in, roasted, bruised, combed, spun it, wove it, and finally bleached it, in preparation for the bridal garment ; and then she had to cut it out, sew, and make it up, as shown in her spiritual lessons, after the most varied and complicated manner. These visionary undertakings were an allegory or type of the toils, mortifications, and self-conquests of her daily life. Every stitch she made with the needle in the bridal robe was the stab of a pain patiently borne, which increased her merit, and brought her nearer to her destination. A virtue which had no depth, and whose effects were incomplete, was represented by a crooked seam, which had to be undone and re-commenced. Every movement of impatience and of hastiness, and the slightest omission or failing appeared as spots and stains which must be removed with infinite pains and trouble. All these tasks increased in arduousness with every succeeding year, rising from the plainest, white linen robe, to all the most elaborate details of bridal array. Every article cost some sacrifice, which was carefully stored up against the day of espousal.

All these varied labours were so simply and naturally amalgamated with her ordinary life, that, as she says herself, "I do not know how it was that my contemplative

tasks did not clash with my ordinary occupations, but I always tried my best never to omit anything I had been set to do in my exterior life; and the others came of themselves."

Anne Catharine had hardly recovered from her illness when her mother apprenticed her to a dressmaker in Coesfeld, in hopes that this new life, and the constant intercourse with all sorts and kinds of people, would shake her resolve of going into a convent. God, however, so arranged it, that this short space of time, hardly extending over two years, should be the most (outwardly) peaceful of her life. She had no occasion to learn her business, for, as she formerly had fulfilled all her outdoor and indoor tasks without desisting from contemplation, even so now her hands skilfully guided needle and thread whilst her eye was never once diverted from heavenly objects, and her fingers faultlessly accomplished the most troublesome pieces of work, without the slightest mental distraction. The first day after her arrival Anne Catharine went up with an anxious heart to the work table, because she knew that vision-pictures would crowd in upon her mind, and that she would be utterly incapable of keeping her attention fixed upon her work, and the fear of hereby exciting the suspicions of her companions troubled her truly. However, her urgent prayers for assistance were heard in heaven, whilst her good angel placed the right word upon her lips as often as she was suddenly addressed, and guided her fingers so deftly, that she finally grew so clever with her hands, whilst her mind was abstracted far from earthly objects, that to the last moments of her suffering life her worst nights were not employed in purely spiritual activity alone, but also in making clothes for poor children, for nurses, and for the sick, without the assistance of either eye or brain. In giving

an account of this double life, when pressed to describe her own sensations at the time, she says, "While I am talking to people, different things and scenes suddenly place themselves before me. Then my own words sound to me like the voice of another person, who is trying, in inarticulate, muffled sounds, to make herself heard from the bottom of a cavern. I feel as if I were giddy, and on the point of falling, nevertheless my conversation goes on of itself quite connectedly, and is sometimes more animated than usual, without my knowing in the least what I am saying. This double life is extremely fatiguing at the time. The objects actually around me look dim and confused; I feel towards them like a person overcome with heavy sleep: objects I see with my mind imperiously demand my attention, and they look clearer than what is seen with the naked eye."

The dressmaker with whom she lived had known her from childhood, and gave a testimony to her character similar to that of her former mistress. "The child came to me at fifteen to learn sewing," she says, "and only remained for two years, as she fell ill, and went home to be nursed. She did her work well, and was industrious and attentive to what I told her, without making any talk about it. She was a very quiet little thing, always shy and silent. She came to me on week-days only; Sundays and holidays she spent with her parents. I never had any fault to find with her, except that she was rather fond of smart clothes. When asked by her confessor about this time, whether she gave way to the indulgence of vanity in her dress, she answered, "I was always neat and tidy in my dress, for the sake of pleasing not men, but God. My mother was frequently dissatisfied with my appearance, and then I went before a looking glass, or some clear water, and put myself to rights. I think it is good for the soul that we should

be cleanly and orderly in our dress. If I went to Holy Communion on a dark morning, I always took as much care over my clothes as at bright midday, because I did it for God, and not for human beings."

CHAPTER VIII.

Obstacles in the Way of Vocation.

As soon as Anne Catharine had recovered from her illness, she went out by the day in Coesfeld, as needlewoman, in the hopes of gaining a sufficient sum by industry and economy to take with her as dower into a convent. Hitherto God had drawn her towards the religious life by extraordinary paths; now, however, she was to tread the common road, learn its dangers and stumbling-blocks, and exercise herself in those struggles which are more or less the lot of all who are called to give up the world for God. He chose that she should experience the weakness of a creature when left to its own strength, and still preserve her bright shining faith when the sensible proofs of His extraordinary illuminations and consolations had vanished, and full freedom was given to external contradictions and obstacles to thwart and oppose her designs. This new phase of her spiritual training began with her seventeenth year and lasted till her twentieth.

Her fond hopes of earning money enough by her sewing to gain her an entry into a convent were soon dashed to the ground, as she found that the trifling wages she

earned a week were gone as soon as received. All she had, she gave to the poor. Great as was her longing to enter the religious state, her love for the poor was yet greater, and when the latter were concerned, the thought that she was despoiling herself never entered Anne Catharine's head. Meeting one day an old woman in a very worn and tattered garment, her pity was so deeply excited that she hastily took off her own skirt and wrapped it round the beggar woman, without stopping to consider that she had no other to take its place. She preferred to suffer want rather than that she should not have the means to help others; she hoped also, by imposing sacrifices upon herself, to strengthen her soul, and to regain that burning zeal which she felt had departed from her since her residence in Coesfeld.

All the consolations which she had hitherto enjoyed in her prayers and practices of devotion had been taken from her, and she fancied that she could discern within herself a great lukewarmness and repugnance to all spiritual occupations. This was a source of grievous anxiety to her, and her trouble increased in proportion as this interior desolation rendered each devotion more painful than the last. Her humility would admit of no other cause for this, than that she herself was guilty in having made a bad use of the graces she had received and had been wanting in zeal and fervour; and she now deemed herself so unworthy of the high calling she had received, that no penance appeared hard enough to make amends for her fault. Therefore she redoubled her accustomed austerities and mortifications, and was painfully careful to omit no devotional exercise, although her repugnance often required her utmost efforts to surmount. Although she had never once to confess the remotest voluntary consent to a disinclination for spiritual things, her sense of guilt and her fear afterward rose to such a height, that she did not dare

receive Holy Communion so often as formerly, till she was compelled to do so, by the express command of her director. For three long years she persevered manfully in this warfare, until at last God allowed the light of His Presence to shine upon her once more, when the fervid love of her soul, and its noble joyous courage, rose up mightier and higher than ever.

At this time she had also to encounter many and divers exterior trials and afflictions. Everyone around her, parents, brothers, sisters, friends, all tried by every possible means to induce her to give up the idea of a convent. Her mistress, for whom she worked, took such an affection for her, that she made her frequent offers, accompanied by most urgent entreaties, of giving her a home and sharing all she had with her, if Anne Catharine could only bring herself to promise that she would never leave her whilst she lived. The girl's piety had so touched this good woman's heart, that she had conceived the plan of retiring with Anne Catharine far from the turmoil of the world, and leading a life wherein they should devote themselves to works of charity; and as she had never interfered in any way with the girl's pious practices, but rather encouraged her in them, she made sure she would gladly accede to a proposal which had all the appearances of offering every compensation for the loss of conventual life. But Anne Catharine was not to be deluded, and declined all these friendly proposals with so much tact and wisdom that the good understanding subsisting between herself and her mistress was never disturbed. Her parents' opposition was much harder to withstand, since they persisted in the conviction that if their daughter could only be brought to take a greater share in worldly dissipations and excitement, she would soon lose her wish to be a nun. They forced her therefore to appear at public places, dances, and the like, and to their commands

were joined the persuasions and entreaties of all her acquaintances and companions of her own age.

Difficult as she had always found it to refuse anyone anything that seemed to give pleasure, it now appeared utterly impossible to continue always to refuse, and to distress her parents when they begged of her to go with them to some apparently harmless country festivity. Twice therefore she gave in, hoping by this compliance to be spared further importunities, and she thus relates the circumstance: "My eldest brother tried hard to persuade me to go with him to a dance, but as I would not, and persisted in my refusal, he flew into a passion, abused me violently, and rushed out of the house. In a few minutes he returned weeping bitterly, and throwing himself upon his knees at my feet in presence of both my parents, he begged forgiveness for his hastiness. Until this time we had never disagreed, and never did so again. When I had once, out of a false idea of giving way to others, consented to go to one of these places of amusement, the deepest sadness fell upon me, and I followed the others in a state of half desperation. Certainly my soul was not present, for I suffered all the pains of hell at the time, and felt as if to get out I must. However I kept staying on and staying on, thinking it would look unseemly if I went away, till at last it seemed to me as though my Celestial Bridegroom Himself were calling me out, and then I rushed from the room, looked all around, and at last found my Betrothed standing under some trees, with a sorrowful and yet angry countenance, His face all disfigured and covered with blood. Then He said to me, 'How faithless thou art! How thou hast forgotten Me! how ill thou hast treated Me! Canst thou not recognize Me now?' Then I besought His forgiveness, and learned what I had to do in order to be preserved from the sins of others: namely, to go and kneel

in an obscure corner and pray with arms outstretched until I had hindered a sin which was about to be committed.

“On one other occasion when I had again, out of a false idea of obedience, allowed myself to be dragged to a public merrymaking, the same power which had torn me away before became stronger and stronger, the more my companions pressed me to stay with them. I escaped, feeling as if the earth would swallow me up; and whilst sorrowfully wending my way homewards, a wondrously beautiful lady came towards me, and with a look of pain on her countenance said: ‘What hast thou done? thou, who art betrothed to My Son, wilt thou thus forsake Him?’ The fair youth Himself, Whom I loved so well, now joined us, His face all tearful and woe-begone, and His reproaches pierced me to the quick. To think that I had lingered in such bad company, whilst He was in pain and waiting for me! I thought I should have died of grief, and implored His mother that she would beg for my forgiveness, promising never to be so weak again. She granted my prayer; I received pardon, and gave my solemn word that I would never be found at such meetings again. Then they left me. I was perfectly wide awake, in full possession of my senses, and they had walked beside me, talking, like any living people. I went home weeping and sobbing bitterly, and the next day was laughed and jeered at for having run away from the others.

“At last I was left in peace, for my father, happening to read in a book one day that parents should not allow their children to go to dances and such like entertainments, repented deeply of having made me attend them against my will, saying, ‘God knows how well I meant it!’ and he fell into such a state of distress about it, that I was obliged to comfort him as best I could.”

Anne Catharine still could not prevail upon either of

her parents to waive their great objection to her embracing the religious life, and before we blame them too severely for opposing their child's evident vocation, we must reflect what a great treasure she was to them both. Ever since God had given her to them, she had been an unmixed source of consolation and delight. A mysterious blessing had rested upon her infancy, which communicated itself insensibly to all around, and influenced all her sayings and doings, the charm of which they seemed to appreciate more keenly whenever it seemed probable that she would be taken from them.

As she grew up, her unspeakable sweetness, gentleness, and unselfish eagerness to anticipate every wish of her parents even before it was uttered, combined with the brightness radiating from a soul ever at peace with itself and in close communion with God, endeared her day by day more and more to their hearts, whilst they looked forward to this daughter as the prop and comfort of their old age. And now the whole fabric of their natural anticipations was to be shattered, and their child lost to them for ever behind the stern walls of a convent, her dear voice never to be heard again save through the barrier of a parlour grating ; for they knew her character well enough to be persuaded that no mitigated rule would suit their child, and that if she entered a convent at all it would be the most austere and strict she could find. Thus they would far rather have been parted from her by marriage, since that condition would not have entailed a perpetual separation. So in giving their consent to their daughter's embracing the path in life to which God had called her, they would be crushing the sunshine out of their lives with their own hand, and receiving no compensation in return. Therefore they besieged the poor child with prayers, supplications, tears, reproaches, violent outbreaks of grief and even of anger, accusing her at times of

wishing to take refuge from the trials of a life of poverty and hard work in the world, until she hardly knew which way to turn, and her sensitive loving heart shrank from the pain she was inflicting on those nearest and dearest to her.

Her refuge in these difficulties was in prayer, where she earnestly sought for light and strength to carry out the object of her desires. "My parents," she told her confessor some time later, "used often to bring me proposals of marriage, to which state I had the greatest repugnance. The thought, however, struck me that my aversion might perhaps spring from a mere idle dread of the toils and anxieties of married life, and therefore I besought God that if it were His Will that I should marry and give in to my parents' wishes, that He would remove this repugnance from my heart. But my desire for the religious life only grew the stronger after this ; and on taking my confessor into my confidence, and asking his advice, he told me that were I the only child of my parents, I should be wrong in entering a convent against their wishes ; but that as I had eight brothers and sisters who would care for them in their old age, I was perfectly free to adhere to my resolution."

The next great event of Anne Catharine's life was her Confirmation, in the eighteenth year of her age, at a time when she was suffering acutely from interior desolation and tormented with the fear of having fallen into a permanent state of lukewarmness. Thus, when she received her invitation to the reception of this holy sacrament, it came to her like a call from heaven, and she made her preparation with the firm conviction that she would recover hereby the strength and joyousness of heart after which she had now sought and striven in vain for one whole year. She made but one prayer at her first communion, "that God would make her a good child ;" and now her request was equally simple, namely, "that

He would always enable her to suffer for Himself and for her fellow-creatures ;” and in order that she might be heard, she redoubled her penances and practices of mortification, already severe and painful enough in truth.

The desire to serve God by prayer and penance, alone and unknown in a foreign land, welled up mightier than ever at this time in her heart ; and as she was once expressing this wish before a friend of hers, saying how that to be a true follower of Jesus Christ, one must forsake all else for Him as did the saints of old, her glowing words made such an impression on her friend that the girl sprang up, declaring herself ready to follow Anne Catharine wherever she chose to lead, in imitation of the example of the saints. Anne Catharine joyfully accepted this proposition, and the two girls agreed forthwith upon a plan to leave their homes, but found afterwards that it could not be carried out.

Anne Catharine describes her reception of the Sacrament of Confirmation thus : “ We candidates walked two and two in procession to Coesfeld. I and my companions waited some little time outside the church door for our turn to go up before the bishop. I had a keen sense of the sacredness of the office which was then going on in the church, and beheld the interior changes which had thereby been effected in those who came out depicted on their countenances.

“ When I entered the church I saw the bishop, looking bright and shining, and, as it were, surrounded by hosts of heavenly gifts and graces ; the holy chrism shone also quite brilliantly ; likewise the foreheads of those upon whom it had been laid. When it came to my turn to be anointed, I felt as if a strengthening fire penetrated through my forehead into my heart. Since then I have often seen the bishop on different occasions, and have hardly recognized him as the same person.”

The wonderful strength and increase of grace which Anne Catharine now received is are shown by the fresh charges of expiation which God laid upon her, and which grew more painful and more bitter day by day. They were often inflicted upon her by purely supernatural means. It was always the guilt of others for which she had to atone, and to bear their share of punishment and anguish. Sometimes this was effected by apparently accidental circumstances, such as falling over a hidden obstacle and cutting and bruising herself painfully, having scalding water upset over her, or falling ill of some inexplicable complaint, which was put down by her neighbours as either hypocrisy or madness. She met all such occurrences with the utmost patience and serenity. Not even the constant blame, mockery, and unjust treatment she received had power to bring a petulant word from her lips, and this was the more admirable in her, since by nature she was of a quick, excitable disposition, and many and many were the hard fights she had with herself to enable her not merely to maintain outward sweetness of demeanour, but to forgive her offenders from the bottom of her heart, and, as was her custom, to implore of God at that very moment that He would exact the punishment from herself instead of from those in fault. Her voluntary expiations for the guilt of others increased tenfold from this memorable strength-giving day. From morning till night her hours were devoted to unwearied toil, whilst her nights were entirely given up to prayer and to the mortification of her body by severe disciplines. From childhood she had kept secret all the penitential instruments—waistbelts, chains, prickly cords, and the like, which she was in the habit of using.

Another of her practices of penance was the manner in which she visited the Stations of the Cross at Coesfeld,

which she did at night, as her days were fully occupied with her work. The gates of the town were shut soon after dark, and to reach the Stations Anne Catharine had to climb over the half-ruined walls, and force her way through a gloomy, tangled pine-wood. To a girl who, by nature, was extremely shy and timid, preferring to stay at home unseen and unheeded, these adventurous expeditions in the dead of night, and in all weathers, were particularly painful, and cost many a hard struggle with herself; yet she never failed to obey when either the entreaties of the souls in Purgatory or the commands of her good angel laid the task upon her. If the night were very tempestuous, she would persuade a friend of pious habits like to her own to bear her company. "Once," she relates, "my friend and I made the Way of the Cross about three o'clock in the morning, and had as usual to clamber over a gate in the town walls, and when we had been round the Stations and returned to the church to pray, I beheld the great Crucifix, covered with all its silver *ex votos* come down towards us, outside the church doors. I saw it quite clearly and distinctly; my companion did not, but heard the silver hearts rattle against one another. After this I generally used to go and pray before this miraculous cross, and have often beheld the crucified figure of our Saviour bend down towards me."

On another occasion she was commissioned to make this act of devotion in order to bring peace between a husband and wife: "The hatred of those two people in Coesfeld for each other," she says, "grieved me so much that on Good Friday I went round the Stations for them. This excited the fury of the devil, who fell upon me in one of the narrow and darkest streets under the form of a man, and tried to murder me. However, I cried out to God

with all my strength, and at that Name he fled away from me. From this time the husband was kinder to his wife."

These midnight devotions apparently renewed all the fury of the powers of hell against the brave girl, and remind us of the days when, as a child of a few years old, her nocturnal adoration by the old field cross was disturbed by their persecutions, as the following instances will show. "My compassion was warmly enlisted," she told Overberg, "by the sorrow of a poor girl, who had been seduced, and then deserted by her lover. I was quite beside myself with grief to think that there should be such wickedness in the world, and agreed with two friends that we would spend the night of Easter Sunday in going fifty-two times into the churchyard at Coesfeld, to pray for the holy souls, in order to induce Almighty God to help the poor girl. The weather was rough and cloudy. We were all barefoot, my two friends walking on either side of me. Whilst I was praying, the devil fell upon me under the form of the girl's seducer, and knocked me from side to side up against my companions; this happened several times, but I only prayed the more fervently, as I saw how any good work enraged the evil one. My friends trembled and cried out loud with fear, though to this day I do not know whether they saw what befel me. When we had fulfilled our task, we were so exhausted that we could do nothing more. So we went home, but on the way back the same apparition seized me again, and threw me head downwards into a tan-pit twenty feet deep. My companions screamed loudly, and thought I must have broken my neck; but I fell quite lightly, and called out, 'Here I am.' At the same moment I felt myself lifted out again, without knowing how, and we continued our way home, praying as we went, without any further interruptions. On Easter Thursday the poor young girl came, with joy beaming in

her face, to tell me her lover was going to marry her, which he did soon afterwards.

“ Another time, when crossing the fields with a friend to pray together, as usual, when we had reached a certain narrow place in the road which we could not avoid, Satan appeared, disguised as a black dog, about as big as up to my shoulder, and barred our passage. As often as I made the sign of the cross, he drew back a few steps, and then came to a standstill again. This lasted for full a quarter of an hour. My companion was so terrified that she clung to me shaking with fright, and was for turning back. However at last I addressed the evil thing in these words, pressing forwards as I said them, ‘ In the name of Jesus, go we will ! We are sent by God, and we will do our work for God. Didst thou come from God, thou wouldst not stop us ! Go thy way, and let us go ours ! ’ At these words the monster disappeared. My friend seeing this regained her composure, and exclaimed, ‘ Why didst thou not say those words at first ? ’ I replied, ‘ Yes, indeed ; but they did not come into my head at first. ’ After this we had peace, but often when in church, praying before the Blessed Sacrament, the devil would fling himself upon the seat beside me, until the wood creaked again. I used to turn hot and cold with terror, but he never drove me away, and the more I prayed, the sooner he vanished.”

When once asked what sort of prayers she used when making the round of the stations, she replied, “ At each stage of Our Lord’s passion I pray for a different class of afflicted persons, and then visions come and show me the people who are in want of help, either to the right or left of the picture before me. Thus, last night I prayed at the first station for those who were preparing their confessions for to-day’s feast, asking God to give them the

grace of a true contrition for their sins, that none might be overlooked or omitted. Whilst praying I beheld people in various places, examining their consciences, either in their houses, or as they went about their business. I saw the state of their consciences, and I incited them by my prayer not to allow themselves to sink back into the slumber of sin. At the second station I prayed for those whose affliction or employments deprived them of sleep, that God might send them hope and consolation. I saw, then, several poor creatures turning about on their miserable straw pallets, thinking that they had no bread for the morrow, whose eyelids God mercifully closed upon their troubles. At the third station I prayed for the cessation of disputes and quarrels, and I saw a husband and wife who had come to blows in their anger, suddenly ask each other's pardon. At the fourth station I prayed for travellers, that they might put aside all worldly thoughts, and imagine themselves journeying in spirit to adore the child Jesus at Bethlehem. At the fifth I prayed for poor prisoners, who in their despair forgot that this was the holy season of Advent, and deprived themselves of much consolation, and so I went on from station to station."

Anne Catharine had been so accustomed, from her earliest infancy, to keep all her practices of devotion and penance secret, that it never occurred to her to mention in confession the way in which she chastised her body, as her humility was too great to allow her to speak of herself, unless questioned directly. Her director, therefore, knew nothing of her vigils, her hair cloths, and disciplines, until they were brought to his knowledge by the girl's mistress, who had accidentally discovered them. After this he questioned her and put her under obedience to follow his advice, and moderate her excessive rigours within the degrees which he considered prudent. He

reassured her at the same time as to her fitness for the religious life, and when she told him how she feared that her poverty would prove an obstacle to her ever being received in a convent, he comforted her by bidding her place all her confidence in Almighty God, and by promising to intercede on her behalf with some Augustinians at Borken. He kept his word, and soon came to Anne Catharine with the joyful news that she was to present herself to the Reverend Mother, who after what he had said about her, was strongly inclined in her favour.

Anne Catharine lost no time in hastening to Borken, and met with a most gracious reception from the Reverend Mother, when suddenly a profound sadness fell upon her, and she could hardly speak for sobs and tears. This extraordinary change of demeanour was occasioned by an interior revelation she received of the relaxed manner in which the rule was observed by the community, and the almost total forgetfulness of the spirit of its holy founder. The abbess, very much astonished at this inexplicable weeping, asked Anne Catharine what could be the matter with her? The girl gave a true, but yet an evasive answer; "I weep," she said, "because I feel that I revere the holy St. Augustine far too little, and that I am not worthy to become one of his children." Hereupon she was dismissed with the recommendation to weigh her project more maturely, and to come to the convent again after she had finally made up her mind. This proposal, however, she entirely rejected in her own mind from that moment. For a space of three years Anne Catharine had now patiently and steadfastly endured her interior desolations, and her heavenly Bridegroom, seeing this, was pleased to give her once more the comfort of His near presence, and to dwell with her in an ever increasing sweet familiar intercourse. Without this supernatural aid, indeed, she could never

have carried through the terrific austerities of her earthly mission.

But how mysterious are the ways of God ! Now that she clearly received help and comfort from the presence of her Lord, every attempt she made to gain admittance into a convent failed. For the last three years she had toiled unweariedly in order to put by a sum for her dowry, and now she found herself as poor as at the beginning. Her betrothed had sent her such a number of His poor, and shown her so many occasions wherein her alms were required, that she had nothing left for herself. But the obstacle that even more than her poverty seemed to rob her of all her hope, lay in her incessant illnesses. She was shown in visions why and wherefore she suffered, but these hidden motives were of small comfort to her daily avocations and the ordinary duties of her state. As the pains of real sickness insisted on making themselves felt, and gradually consumed all strength, she was soon completely unfit to do her usual work, and her confessor, whom, after her ill success with the Augustinians at Borken, she entreated to give her a recommendation to the Trappistines at Darfield, declared that he could not give his consent to such a weak delicate person's going into that severe order ; but seeing the dismay involuntarily depicted on her expressive countenance at these words, he comforted her by promising to do what he could for her with the Poor Clares at Munster. From them he received a favourable answer, and sent Anne Catharine to make her request in person.

Disappointment again awaited her, for these nuns declared that as their house was so poor, and she could bring no dowry, they could only receive her on condition of her learning to play the organ, so as to make herself of use to the community. Determined not to be defeated in her resolve, Anne Catharine made up her mind at

once to learn ; first of all, however, her ill health, which got worse every day, necessitated her going home for some time to recover strength. A friend of her's, who accompanied her on this expedition to Munster, gives the following account of it : " I became acquainted with A. C. Emmerich in Coesfeld, where we grew very intimate, and knowing her intense desire of becoming a nun, I volunteered to accompany her to the Poor Clares, as I had two relations in their convent. Her longing to be a nun was so great, that when I explained to her how likely it was that all convents would shortly be confiscated and dispersed, she assured me that if she could only get inside one, with the full knowledge that in eight days she would be hanged, she still would go in. The strictest orders were her favourites. Our talk together was always on religious subjects : she used to teach me the duties of a Christian, and tell me portions out of the lives of holy women, such as Sts. Mechtilde, Gertrude, Catharine, and Clare. She went to Communion every Sunday and holiday, and used to pray all night long upon her knees when in our house, when she often told me that her especial devotion was to the Five Sacred Wounds, and to the Three Wounds which Christ had upon His shoulder, because those pained Him the most. She never wore anything but the roughest woollen stuffs next her skin. On holidays she generally abstained, and at night would often make the way of the Cross as a fresh devotion, after the prayers of the day. Her patience was something marvellous ; and whenever I had any pain to bear, she always managed to comfort me by the way she talked to me of Christ's sufferings. People used to say she wanted to be a nun out of pride and laziness, which pleased her very much ; for then she said she was like her Lord, Who was so often unjustly accused. She was equally kind and pleasant to all, very industrious, and so generous that she gave away

everything she possessed. I never heard her speak ill of any one."

We should, perhaps, weary our readers if we related more of the testimonies given to Anne Catharine's worth by the companions of her youth, for they all agree in describing her loveable qualities, her charity, her obedience to her parents and superiors, her piety, and her zeal for the welfare of the souls and bodies of her neighbours. By some her avoidance of dances, her fasts, and the occasional discoveries they made of her self-imposed penances, such as finding her bed filled with nettles, or hard lumps of wood, were deemed fanatical madness, and she was laughed at accordingly, but by the generality she was held in veneration, little short of that evinced towards a saint, and her friends, whether in the work-room or the field, would love to crowd round her and listen to the moving tales she had ever on her lips, of the sorrows and sufferings of her dear Lord, or of the joys of Bethlehem and sweet ways of the Mother of God, according to the time of the Church's year. And in conclusion she always knew how to give some little bit of advice, some word of comfort or hint of warning, adapted to the wants of each one, which sent her young hearers from her side better and more thoughtful than they came.

CHAPTER IX.

Anne Catharine as Maid of all Work.

As soon as Anne Catharine had regained her strength sufficiently to work as usual, she again used her utmost exertions to gain enough by her needlework to pay for some lessons upon the organ; and whilst by day the needle was never out of her hand, her evenings were spent at the spinning-wheel, so that she might have a few pieces of linen, at any rate, to take with her into a convent. The work prospered under her hands so rapidly that in course of one year she had made over twenty thalers by her sewing, and had laid by a considerable provision of fine linen. These twenty thalers appeared such an enormous sum in her eyes, that she would never have dared to keep them for her own use, had any other way of gaining admission into a convent been open to her.

So long as she remained with her parents, the latter renewed their old attempts to dissuade her from the religious life, her mother often asking her pitifully how she could ever expect to do the rough and menial tasks that would fall to her share on account of her poverty, always ailing and delicate as she was. "Oh! mother," she would then answer, "no matter what they give me to do; let me suffer as I may; at any rate I shall be sheltered from the dangers and storms of the outside world!" Such reasoning her mother could not comprehend, for she had always

seen her child keep so much aloof from the world, that she did not believe a greater retirement possible, and therefore her entreaties never ceased. Anne Catharine however reasoned and expostulated so gently and amiably that her mother could not find it in her heart to quarrel with her, or seriously to oppose her plan of engaging herself as servant in the house of the Cantor Sontgen in Coesfeld, with the arrangement that she should receive lessons upon the organ in lieu of wages.

This plan she soon put into execution, but had not been long in the house, before she discovered that, far from learning to play the organ, she had to be maid of all work, and moreover to deprive herself of actual necessities in order to feed and clothe its owners. So great was their poverty and distress, that as usual Anne Catharine's sympathies were aroused to their utmost, and she could not rest until she had devoted all her time and all her strength to their assistance. Her hardly earned savings went first, then all her beautiful provision of linen, and to quote her own words to Overberg : " As for organ-playing, there was none. I had to be servant and to work far too hard to learn the organ, for the moment I came into the house, I saw so much want and misery, I could not do otherwise than give all I had and work for them. The organ they never taught me : and oh ! what hunger I endured in that house. Perhaps for a week together there was not a single loaf of bread in the house. People would not give the Sontgens credit for so much as sevenpence. I was their servant, and though I gave away all I had earned by my sewing, I was often starving with hunger. Even my clothes I parted with.

" My good mother came to see me one day, and was so sorry for me that she brought us some bread and butter, eggs and milk, upon which the others lived entirely. Once the poor thing said to me, ' Thou hast given my heart a

deep wound, but thou art my child all the same, and when I look at thy empty chair at home, my heart feels like to break.' I answered her, 'God will reward thee for it, dear mother. I have now nothing left, but it was His will that I should be the means of keeping these poor people alive. God will now take care of me Himself; I have given Him all I had, and He will know how best to provide for me.' Then my good mother went away comforted. I often turned it over in my mind, how I should ever get into a convent now! everything seemed so against me and I so poor. I often used to say to God, 'I know not what to do; I cannot help myself; Thou Thyself hast arranged it all, so Thou Thyself must manage it for me.'"

Whilst Anne Catharine was in this house, Clara, the daughter of Cantor Sontgen, became inspired, through her intercourse with the holy girl, to enter the religious life, and her father who was deeply touched with Anne Catharine's uncalled for self-sacrifice to him and his, made her a promise, out of gratitude, that he would do all in his power to get her into a convent.

His daughter was of the same age as herself, and being a first rate musician, he knew that she would be gladly received by any Community, and therefore he determined to make it a condition of her entering a convent, that Anne Catharine should be taken in also. Care for his child had not a little to do with his resolve, for he had often said before Anne Catharine, "Clara shall never go into a convent; the rule now-a-days is not kept as it used to be. If only you were with her, I should not mind, for you would keep her in the right way."

The two girls set forth and knocked at many a convent door together, imploring to be received within the walls, but always in vain; sometimes the dowry they brought was too scanty, sometimes the nuns would only agree to take

in Clara. Cantor Sontgen, however, stood firm, and when the Augustinians at Dulmen, who were in great want of an organist, begged that Clara might come to them, he insisted that Anne Catharine should accompany her, and gained his point.

Before quitting this abode of so much toil and endurance, but which had yet been the stepping stone to the realization of all Anne Catharine's hopes, we will listen to her friend's description of her, after three years of close, familiar intercourse. "We slept in the same room," Clara says, "and I noticed that instead of linen she always wore a rough woollen shift next her skin, and bound a thick knotted girdle of rope round her waist, so tightly that it often cut deep into the flesh. Her confessor found this out, and forbade her to wear it any longer. She told me afterwards though, that from the time she was forbidden to wear this girdle, she discovered that a red mark had appeared round her body, under the skin; and, when she came in from her evening prayers, I often saw her whole body covered with the marks of having been torn by nails, for before going to bed she used generally to go out of doors to pray. Sometimes when she came in her skin was swollen and covered with white blains, and when I pointed this out to her, she was forced to confess that she had flogged herself with nettles; and she also told me that whilst praying thus, a horrible black beast would come and peer into her face, with its head over her shoulders, and as she never ceased praying, would suddenly vanish.

"We were often disturbed at our prayers when praying together, either by a violent knocking, or by having our faces suddenly buried in our pillows, until we were nearly smothered. Anne Catharine used to get up and look round the house and garden to see if she could find anything, but she never did, and these alarming occurrences

sometimes lasted till past midnight. We often used to say 'Our Fathers' together for the holy souls, when we were in bed, and one night as we were praying, a bright light appeared before the bed. Anne in the greatest delight, exclaimed 'Look there, how beautiful!' but I was alarmed, and could not look at it."

Anne Catharine having at last completed her bridal treasure by practices of humiliation, poverty, and utter immolation of self, her Heavenly Bridegroom Himself supplied the most precious jewel which was to adorn her at the ceremony of her espousals with Him. This jewel was nothing less than the crown which He had designed to wear on His own Sacred Head when on earth. During the last year of her residence with the Sontgens, it so happened that she was kneeling one day in the Jesuits' church at Coesfeld, absorbed in her devotions, up in the organ gallery before a crucifix, when she suddenly felt a soft warmth, which made her look up, and she beheld her Heavenly Bridegroom come forth from the tabernacle in the form of a radiant youth. In His left hand He held a garland of flowers, in His right a crown of thorns, and bade her choose between the two. Anne Catharine, without hesitation, stretched out her hands for the thorny crown, which He placed upon her head, and she then pressed it down herself with both hands. It gave her indescribable pains, which never quitted her henceforth. The apparition disappeared, and when Anne Catharine awoke out of her vision, she heard the rattle of the keys, with which the sacristan was about to lock up the church; so she went quietly home with her companion, Clara Sontgen, who had no suspicion of what had happened. Feeling great pain in her head above her eyes and round her temples, she asked her friend whether she could see anything the matter with her head, to which Clara replied in the negative. Some days after

this, however, her brow and temples began to swell enormously, but as yet there were no signs of blood stains. These did not appear until she was in the convent, where she strove carefully to conceal them from the knowledge of any of her sisters. She succeeded for several years, one person alone discovering her secret, who kept it faithfully.

This crown of thorns was visibly present to Anne Catharine on the days of the Passion, in the same manner as St. Teresa's jewels, ring, and belt, with which she had been adorned in an ecstasy, were present to her ocular senses when she came to herself. Anne Catharine described it as consisting of three species of thorns twisted together; one strand was of hawthorn, upon which blossomed several small white flowers; the second strand had the same blossom upon it, with much broader leaves, and the third looked like the bough of a wild rose bush. She used frequently to press this crown tightly down upon her head, when absorbed in prayer, and distinctly felt each thorn pierce deeper and deeper through the skin.

CHAPTER X.

Anne Catharine enters the convent at Dulmen.

AT last Anne Catharine has reached the summit of her long awaited hopes, and has reached them under circumstances which were indeed a real and worthy conclusion to the long wearisome path of suffering, which the bride, with unvarying fidelity, had followed on her way to meet her bridegroom.

A few days before she and Clara Sontgen left the world, as they thought for ever, to shelter themselves behind the walls of the Augustinian convent in Dulmen, Anne Catharine paid a last visit to the old cottage-home at Flamske, to bid farewell to her sorely afflicted parents. She thanked them, with heartfelt emotion, for all the love they had shown her, and begged their forgiveness, and that of her brothers and sisters, for the pain she was giving them all by her inability to forsake the vocation to which God had called her. Her mother could give no other answer save tears, but her father, generally so kind a man, when she humbly asked him for a little money to pay for her journey, overcome by the bitter grief of a now irrevocable parting, exclaimed in reply: "If you were to be buried to-morrow that ever is, I would gladly pay all costs of the burial, but not one farthing will I give to help you into a convent!"

Weeping, therefore, but with a deep fount of joy springing up in her heart, poor and denuded of all this

world's goods, she left the home of her youth that same evening, in order to hasten all the sooner to meet her bridegroom. She and Clara were to have started from Coesfeld for Dulmen by break of day, but at the very last moment the two friends met with a fresh hindrance. Cantor Sontgen had recently received the promise of a loan of ten thalers, under the sole condition that Anne Catharine should go security for him. He now came forward to her with his request, and did not cease to beg and pray of her, until she consented to sign the bill, trusting that God would come to her aid. Of money she had not one farthing, and of clothes only what was of the strictest necessity. These few garments were kept in an old wooden chest, amongst a quantity of old bed furniture. Here Anne Catharine's mother had secretly hidden a linen shift, in order that her dear daughter should not leave her without receiving a gift of some sort. When Anne Catharine discovered this treasure, she did not consider herself justified in keeping it for herself, but at once made it over to Clara Sontgen as a token of gratitude for her having facilitated her entry into the convent. For this act of self-denial she received a rich reward in the mysterious book of prophecy of which we have already spoken.

Since the foundation of the convent, never had a postulant been received who was so destitute of all earthly things, or so rich in spiritual graces as this young girl. But, alas for human nature ! in spite of the urgent desire she evinced on all occasions to be considered the least in the house, and the servant of all, her every word and look testifying the real joy it gave her to fulfil the hardest task obedience could lay upon her, she never succeeded in overcoming the general dislike and indignation excited amongst all the community by a person so poverty-stricken and in such delicate health, having the audacity

to impose herself as a fresh burden upon their already needy house. This convent of female Augustinians was founded in the latter years of the fifteenth century, and had always been in very poor circumstances. During the Thirty Years' War the nuns were reduced to so great distress, that had it not been for the generosity of the inhabitants of Dulmen, they must inevitably have been disbanded. From that time their condition improved very slightly, and at no time was the convent in a position to provide for all the wants of its members, or to organize a complete community-life, according to the letter of the rule. The house was just kept together by the dowries of some of the nuns, or by the earnings of others at needlework, and therefore, as can be easily imagined, they often had to endure actual distress and want, which was only mitigated by the uncertain gifts they received from friends without the walls. With regard to its spiritual condition, this convent at the time of Anne Catharine's arrival was in much the same state as most of the female communities in Germany at that disturbed period. As for a punctual observance of the rule, such a thing was not thought of, nay, the very rule itself was almost buried in oblivion. Those doors, formerly so sternly closed, stood now-a-days open to visitors of all kinds, without any distinction, and the silence, calmness, and tranquillity proper to a religious house, had long since been out of the question. The nuns lived more like visitors who had met together by accident, and had resolved to pass the remainder of their lives sociably together, than like members of a spiritual family knit together by rule and vow, and bound by all that was most sacred to aim at nothing short of perfection. The force of habit and poverty kept them within the bounds of some sort of outward order and decency, but still it was the habit alone, and not the increase of piety

in the wearers, which distinguished the community from ordinary Christians living in the world. It was into the midst of a disorder such as this that God sent Anne Catharine, that she might even here climb the few yet remaining steps of the ladder of perfection she had hitherto ascended so faithfully. The disadvantages of her position would be to her as slight a hindrance as had been the many unsuccessful attempts thrown in her path, to prevent her from effecting an entrance into the convent. As it was her mission to be a victim of atonement for the sins of others, so everything which would have been the cause of stumbling and ultimate ruin to other people, was converted for her into a means of maintaining her fidelity to God in greater purity and perfection. The decay of cloistral order and discipline, the dissolution of all ties of obedience, the destitution of all judicious spiritual training, in a word the total want of decorum in the religious houses of that date, which drew down upon them their terrible judgment, in the shape of the universal suppression of convents, became for Anne Catharine so many royal roads to perfection, and were but as a spur which urged her on perpetually to serve God with heightened zeal and fervour.

The first few months she passed as a postulant, still in the clothes she wore when in the world. She occupied the same cell as Clara Sontgen, and was uncertain from one moment to another whether she should not be sent away again. However, God gave her so much strength during this trying time that she was enabled to be of use to the community by her needle, and earned sufficient besides to pay for her own trifling wants, and for the cost of her clothing with the habit, thereby escaping the danger of being dismissed on the ground of uselessness.

On the 13th November, 1802, at the age of twenty-six, she had the happiness of receiving the habit, and of

being formally received as a novice. The worst cell in all the house was now appropriated to her use. It had for all its furniture one chair without a back, and another without a seat, with the window sill as a table; "Yet this my poor cell," she related in after years, "was always so richly adorned, and so full of joy to me, that it seemed to me that I beheld all heaven therein!" It is easy to imagine the kind of spiritual education which the novices received, in a community where all rule had disappeared, with all those practices by which formerly the sincerity of the vocation was tried and attested. Anne Catharine longed for the austere mortifications, humiliations, and proofs of solid obedience, which the old convent rule prescribed, but there was no one there to impose them upon her. To her it appeared ever far more meritorious and efficacious to practise humiliation by obedience than by voluntary acts of penance; and here there would have been no one to offer her the opportunity of thus meriting had not her Divine Bridegroom Himself come forward as her Teacher, and led a willing pupil step by step up the hill of spiritual progress, by means of the very circumstances of her position which seemed outwardly so unfavourable, and by every apparently casual circumstance of her position.

For instance, if Anne Catharine had had an experienced and discreet novice-mistress, the latter would soon have discovered her ardent longings after perfection, would have undertaken their guidance, and have suffered nothing resembling an imperfection or a failing in her conduct. By nature, as has been remarked, she was of a quick, excitable disposition, easily provoked by the sight of any injustice, and the governing of this impetuosity was a task she could not have accomplished by her own unaided efforts. Therefore God allowed it to come to pass that from the earliest days of her noviciate she should be sus-

pected and accused of things of which she was totally innocent, and publicly punished for them—a treatment which she endured without a murmur or one word of exculpation or self-defence.

One of these trials took place as follows. The small revenues of the convent were increased by any little ways which could be devised, and amongst these was that of boarding for a very moderate sum some poor French nuns who had been expelled from their own country, and likewise an aged brother of the reverend mother. After a while the poor little French nuns casually discovered that the latter paid less for his food than they did for theirs, who could ill afford to pay anything, and they complained bitterly to the Superior about this cruel injustice. Hereupon ensued a searching investigation as to who could have betrayed this secret to the strangers.

No one in the house would confess to having done it, and so the blame fell upon Anne Catharine, as all knew that she had a particular affection for the French nuns on account of the persecution they had suffered for their calling's sake, and the great poverty they were enduring. To no avail did she with perfect truth declare that she had never troubled herself about the board or sum paid by either the nuns or the Superior's brother, and that, as she was a new-comer, she could know nothing of the customs of the house. The accusation of treachery remained upon her shoulders, and she was forced to bear in silence the sharp reprimands of the reverend mother and of all the chapter, and to submit meekly to the enforced punishment. Added to this, the complaints of all the nuns burst forth afresh, because they had taken in a poor, portionless peasant girl, who now rewarded their kindness with base ingratitude.

Thus Anne Catharine had not merely the pain of these unmerited and suspicious rebukes to bear, but to her pre-

sent sorrow was added that of feeling that although perfectly guiltless herself, she had been the involuntary cause of an act of injustice. She had no one to whom she could confide her grief and claim a word of sympathy, and therefore was compelled to shut herself up, as it were, with the whole weight of her distress. She succeeded in conquering human nature so far as to feel nothing but the warmest charity towards all her sisters, forgiving them from the bottom of her heart, even thanking God for this unmerited injury in the light of a just discipline ; but her health broke down under it, and a severe illness was the consequence, from which she was many weeks in recovering.

About Christmas time in the year 1802 she began to suffer from violent pains at her heart, which soon rendered work impossible to her. In vain she gathered together all the remains of strength she possessed, in order to ward off the impending illness, so that she might not be an additional burthen to the community ; the pain steadily increased. It felt to her as though she were being ceaselessly pierced with arrows, and finally she was completely prostrated and forced to keep her bed. Her condition was now indeed pitiable, left to the mercy of a hostile crew of women, who grudged the slight services they rendered her, and to none of whom she could open her heart and confide the true cause of her sufferings. They could not understand that she was tortured by pains at the heart. They called in the convent doctor, who treated her for cramps. This was the first time in her life she had been under medical treatment, as at home she had always cured herself by simple decoctions of the herbs whose healing qualities she knew well, and by the peace and quiet around her. Now, however, peace was no longer hers ; the rules of the house ordered her to make her illness known, and to accept the services of the doctor.

As an obedient novice, she dared not refuse to take any of his remedies, although she was interiorly convinced that her disease was mental, and that her anguish could be assuaged by spiritual means alone. Thus she meekly submitted herself to be treated as an ordinary invalid, and was happy amidst her pains in the fact that here was an opportunity of practising obedience.

The actual cause of this illness she hardly dared, in her deep humility, to confess to herself, much less to any of the nuns ; the truth being that when she received the holy habit of St. Augustine it had seemed to be placed around her shoulders by the great patron himself, who adopted her as his daughter, showed her her place in his family and in his own glowing heart, and kindled in her heart a fire similar to that which consumed his own, so that from thenceforth she saw and experienced the whole spiritual signification of the holy habit clearly and distinctly as other people see its outward texture and form, and likewise beheld the nature of the spiritual communion in which she and the other sisters were knit together by means of this habit, like so many separate rivulets, as it were, from one source, which branched off to unite themselves again in one wider channel which flowed on in silent depth through their midst. This centre channel she saw to be her own heart ; for to her was the terrible mission given to feel sensibly in her own heart all the pains, injuries, and outrages which the faults and sins of the community inflicted upon the heart of her heavenly Bridegroom. Her heart was now therefore unceasingly beset by grief and pain of every shape and kind. Everything that was done in the convent against rule and vow ; every word and every deed ; every omission and every procrastination, pierced her afresh to the very quick, until she hardly knew how to support her existence under the overwhelming load of her grief.

In order to bring her to a yet more perfect state of submissive resignation in the fiery crucible by which God was now trying her, He permitted the devil to tempt her with whisperings of evil.

The evil one came to her sometimes in the guise of an angel of light, persuading her to return to the world, since she must see by this time that impossibilities were demanded of her. He then pictured to her the future sufferings which were in store on the part of her sisters in religion ; but Anne Catharine recognized the tempter, and put him to flight with the sign of the cross before he had time to finish all his insidious suggestions.

At other times he sought to excite her heart to feelings of murmuring and anger against her superiors, or to inspire her with fear and terror of them, in order by this means to induce her to quit the convent. One night he gave her especial trouble. It appeared to her as though the Reverend Mother and the novice-mistress suddenly came up to her bedside, and addressed bitter reproaches to her, declaring that she was utterly unworthy of the religious calling, and must be speedily expelled from the convent. Anne Catharine listened in silence to all these invectives, and merely answered how conscious she was of her own unworthiness, and begged for their forgiveness and mercy, upon which the two angry women left her cell, still uttering reproaches against her. She lay weeping and praying until morning, when she implored that her confessor might be sent for. She then narrated the events of the night to him, and asked his advice as to what she could do to soften the ire which the Reverend Mother felt against her. When, however, this priest came to make enquiries, it turned out that neither the Superior nor any of the other nuns had been near Anne Catharine's cell during the night, and he declared the whole circumstance to be a temptation of the devil, whilst Anne

Catharine thanked God, who had given her the strength, by her humility, in feeling herself really unworthy of the honour of being in a convent, to conquer so virulent an attack of the evil one.

When, after several weeks, Anne Catharine was once more out of the doctor's hands, the most casual observer could easily perceive that her recovery was far from being sound or complete. She seemed so weak and feeble that a universal murmur arose against the encumbrance such a delicate useless member would be to the convent, if she were to be permitted to take final vows; it was, therefore, proposed to send her away now, lest if they kept her longer, they should be eventually unable to get rid of her. Although these unworthy proposals were whispered at the extreme opposite end of the house, Anne Catharine heard them as distinctly as if they had been spoken to her face in her own cell; even the very designs and plans which the others nurtured against her, unspoken in their own hearts, were known to her, and burnt and wounded her keen susceptibility, like so many sparks of fire. The gift of being able to read the hearts of others, which Anne Catharine had possessed from her childhood, and which whilst living amongst her own simple, upright, and mostly friendly-minded peasantry, had brought her few unpleasant moments, now became a source of never-ending torture, since she knew everything her sisters thought of her, or felt about her. The wicked passions of their hearts were laid bare before her eyes, she had ever to atone for them by prayer and penance, as though they were foreign enemies, to be fought against and conquered by the arms of unvarying love, patience, and gentleness.

Did a sigh, a word of complaint, or a sign of impatience escape her involuntarily, as would sometimes happen after some new act of petty tyranny or injustice, she would instantly, with tears in her eyes, and with the

accents of true contrition for a fault, beg pardon of the sisters, till all were touched and favourably inclined towards her afresh. Then she would run into the church, and kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament, pray for strength to get through her work, and hasten back to redouble her exertions, keeping down the pain at her heart with the words, "I will persevere, I will endure to the end, even were I on the rack."

One Friday in February she was kneeling in the convent chapel upon one of these occasions, praying in solitude before the Blessed Sacrament, when she suddenly beheld a cross in front of her, about two spans high, on which our Saviour hung, streaming with blood. "I was terrified," she says, "by the apparition, and turned hot and cold by turns; for I saw the whole Church gather round me, and I saw that bleeding figure on the cross, not with the eyes of my mind, but actually present to my physical sight. At the same moment I felt that by this spectacle God was preparing me for some great trouble or suffering. I was frightened, and drew back, but the woeful aspect of my Saviour conquered all disinclination to suffer, and I felt ready for the bitterest pangs that could befall me, if my Lord would give me patience to endure them."

She was not deceived in her presentiment, for the gift of Tears was now bestowed upon her, that she might weep in the most acutely painful manner, over all the injuries committed against her Divine Bridegroom, floods of tears, which were to be the source of perpetual humiliations to her. She could never henceforth restrain these tears, which burst forth with irrepressible vehemence whenever an object presented itself to either her exterior or interior senses, which gave rise to the supernatural sorrow of atonement. They surprised her in church, at Holy Communion, at meals, over her work, and during her inter-

course with the community, by whom she was plainly given to understand how exceedingly distasteful she had thereby become to her sisters. They overcame her principally at Mass, in choir, and when receiving Holy Communion, but at first they escaped public notice. As however, the sobs grew more vehement, Anne Catharine was called up and questioned, and forbidden to give way to this weeping, for it was deemed a sign of discontent and self-will. She promised, on her knees, to amend herself, and to repress her tears; but on the very next day, after Mass, the nuns, to their increased irritation, and with ever-increasing suspicion, discovered that the bench against which Anne Catharine had knelt, was perfectly wet through with tears, from which they drew fresh proof that the young novice's head was filled with ideas of self-importance, and that her self-love was perpetually wounded by fancied ill-treatment on their part. However, as reproofs and punishment alike were received by Anne Catharine with unvarying meekness and humility, without her uttering a word in her own defence, her superior was obliged to acknowledge that this heavy weeping must be even more troublesome to the poor novice herself than to her companions, and that it perhaps proceeded from a nervous weakness, or physical peculiarity, and not from temper or discontent. Anne Catharine herself, however, was so far from finding anything peculiar in her tears, that she grew uneasy and anxious about them, and wondered whether some secret aversion, or perhaps a deeply-concealed hatred against her sisters, might not be festering in her heart, which was the actual origin of this weeping.

She did not venture to decide this question for herself, but laid the matter before her confessor, that he might pass judgment upon it. He very soon pacified her by declaring that it was pitying sympathy, and not hatred,

whence they sprang. Anne Catharine now cherished a hope that with time the violence of this compassion would be mitigated, and the fountain of tears gradually dried; but the result was far otherwise; it grew rather than diminished in intensity, and in her dismay she sought advice from every confessor with whom she was thrown into spiritual intercourse at this time of her life. They one and all agreed in pronouncing these tears the result of her amazing compassion. Overberg himself testifies on the subject: "Anne Catharine had such a love for her sisters, that she would gladly have shed her life's blood for them. Although she knew that many of them were the reverse of friendly towards her, she did everything that lay in her power to give them pleasure. Her greatest joy was whenever one of them asked some service of her, for then she hoped they were growing better satisfied with her. God permitted that she should be misunderstood by the Superior and by the community, and that all she did should be put down as hypocrisy, cajolery, or pride, and with such accusations she was reproached. At first she tried to exculpate herself; finding this of no avail, she said nothing more than "I will try and correct myself." Whenever she saw her sisters in religion, she wept in spite of herself, and especially when in chapel. She was often scolded for this weeping, as they often took it for obstinacy or discontent; and she was the more blamed when it occurred during holy Mass. The sufferings which were thus caused her by her sisters were rendered the more acute by her power of seeing in spirit all the secret feelings of their hearts, and of hearing their unkind whisperings together about herself. She knew beforehand the plans they concocted together, and how they meant to humiliate her, and cure her of her lazy, whimsical ways. Sometimes she told them that she knew what they were thinking and saying, and then

was taken to task as to how she knew it? and as she would not tell them, they concluded that one amongst themselves must have been telling tales; but were in nowise altered in their conduct to her.

Her old friend, Clara Sontgen, also testifies to the wonderful love and forgivingness Anne Catharine ever showed to her very unamiable sisters: "her greatest delight," she told Overberg, "was to render an act of kindness to one of the community. They might ask of her what they would, and she gave it with pleasure, though often in urgent want of the article herself; and by preference she tried to please them the most who were the most unkindly disposed towards her." Once when questioned about a great service of love she had rendered to one of her sisters during an illness, she replied, "The sister had wounds on her feet, and the servants disliked attending upon her because she was so captious, so I thought it would be a work of mercy, and I took upon myself to wash the cloths with which she bound up her sores, and cleansed them from the blood and matter. She had the itch also, and as the others all feared to catch it, I made her bed for her, and, if ever I felt afraid of taking the infection, I encouraged myself by thinking that as I was doing an act of charity, God would preserve me from bad consequences; the thought often came across my mind, too, that as the sister was so odd and whimsical, very likely she would be vexed with me for my services when she got well again, and would not cease to call me, as she often had before, a little hypocrite; but then I thought, well, I shall have all the more merit in God's eyes if it be so; and so I went on washing out her bandages, making her bed, and doing for her as well as I knew how."

Anne Catharine had received from God so deep a sense of the meaning and hidden workings of the religious

vows, that her brave soul thirsted for the ancient practices of obedience, and suffered especially from the fact that, in consequence of the relaxed habits of the convent, next to no attention was given by her superiors to proving and trying her by severe commands, and by the imposition of works difficult of accomplishment. Thus, inspired by these longings, she often went up to the Reverend Mother, imploring her to lay upon her some command, by way of testing her obedience, and to give her the opportunity of being faithful to her vow. Such prayers were vain however, and were merely regarded by her Superior as scruples or eccentricities, and all the answer Anne Catharine could get from the good-natured but weak mother abbess, was, "You are wise enough, and know what to do quite as well as I can tell you;" and so she remained as before, completely left to her own guidance. The want of such practices of obedience troubled the zealous novice to tears, for it seemed to her that the blessings attached to so holy an order were diminished thereby, and it grieved her that she could not serve her Divine Bridegroom perfectly, through her spiritual superiors, who should have been his representatives.

Although, however, exterior opportunities might be wanting to her for the practice of the virtue of obedience, she strove earnestly to make up for this by an increase of interior submission, and by bringing all the thoughts and feelings of her mind, and the very workings of her soul, into conformity with the spirit and letter of the rule: in order the better to effect this, she used every means in her power to gain a perfect and fundamental knowledge of the same. Her reverence forbade her to study it, except upon her knees, and it frequently happened to her, whilst so occupied, that her candle was blown out, and the book knocked over by some invisible power. She knew well enough, from long experience, whence

such interruptions came, and so she quietly re-lit the candle, and recommenced with even greater zest than before. Moreover, these very violences which she suffered at the hands of the devil were a joy to her, inasmuch as they were in some sort a compensation to her zeal for the dearth of the usual practices of humiliation. Whenever he pursued her with blows and ill usage, on account of her attention to the rule, that attention was redoubled, and if, as would often happen, he succeeded in raising a storm against her amongst the community, even those who were the most bitter against her were forced to testify how deep and sincere was her desire for the occasion of practising a humble and blind obedience. The following is an instance of this: a rich merchant-family from Amsterdam had placed their daughter at school in the convent. When, after some residence there, she was about to return to her parents, she made a present of a Dutch shilling to each of the nuns; but to Anne Catharine, to whom she was very much attached, she gave two, which coins the latter immediately handed over to the Reverend Mother. A few days after this, a great murmuring arose throughout the convent, and Anne Catharine was summoned before the chapter, where the Reverend Mother informed her that she was accused by the community of having received five crowns from the merchant's daughter, out of which she had only given two shillings to the superior, and had made over the rest to Cantor Sontgen, who had, as it happened, paid Clara a visit just at that time. Put on her honour to confess her guilt, Anne Catharine related the true state of the case, and maintained her assertions steadily, although all the nuns combined to accuse her, and pressed her to acknowledge that she had committed the offence. For her obstinacy, as they termed it, she was sentenced to ask pardon of each sister upon her knees. Anne Catha-

rine accepted this punishment with perfect submission, beseeching God the while that He would cause all the nuns to forgive her from the bottom of their hearts, for all that she had done to displease them. A few months later the merchant's daughter came to the convent, when Anne Catharine besought the Reverend Mother to enquire into the truth of the matter from her, but all the answer she received was an injunction to let the old forgotten story rest undisturbed.

From this circumstance we perceive how quickly dislike and suspicion of the innocent girl arose in the hearts of these weak, silly women. The storm was allayed, however, as quickly as it had arisen, and before it had reached its culmination; for the impression which the ways and conduct of this strange novice made upon the minds of these inexperienced, common-place nuns, was always of a very mixed nature.

The unutterable meekness and patient sweetness which Anne Catharine displayed when performing her public penance, the deep and touching sincerity with which she made her request for forgiveness, could not fail to melt the hardest of hearts; then, on the other hand, there was much in her of a mysterious nature, quite enough to arouse the suspicions of shallow unthinking minds like those of these poor foolish women. The riches of her interior life, the multiplicity of her wonderful gifts, and the quiet self-possession of her whole being, were too strikingly singular to be hidden, and made her too unlike other people for Anne Catharine to succeed in passing for an ordinary person.

However simple and retiring her outward demeanour might be, a certain majesty and odour of sanctity enveloped her, which was more or less felt by all who were brought into contact with her. Sometimes they did not choose to confess to this, and then preferred to designate

Anne Catharine as an eccentric, tiresome, and somewhat uncomfortable sort of a person.

She was often dragged to the presence of the Blessed Sacrament by an involuntary power which she could not have resisted if she would. She then knelt or else lay suddenly as though lifeless upon the steps of the altar, or in the choir, without knowing how she got into the church; rapt in unceasing contemplation, and suffering at the same time a bodily anguish which was out of her power to conceal entirely. Consequently she was an enigma to those about her—a something incomprehensible, and, to use a homely expression, an *uncanny* apparition amongst them.

The novice-mistress, when missing her from her accustomed place, would go in search of her; and, were the bitter cold of the German winter ever so excessive, invariably found her lying prostrate upon her face on the altar steps, where she had lain for hours until her limbs were frozen and stiff, and where she would have remained all night had she not been aroused to passing and earthly events.

CHAPTER XI.

Solemn Profession.

THE year of noviciate was drawing to a close, and the community were still undecided whether they would keep the poor novice and permit her to take the final vows or not. Her friend, the novice-mistress, in vain repeated the assurance that she found the girl entirely without fault, that she was always good and contented with God's will. Her word alone was not sufficient to overcome the opposition of the rest of the nuns. Whenever the question of her reception or dismissal was discussed in chapter, the only grounds for the latter course which the sisters could find was the possibility, according to outward appearances, that Anne Catharine would soon be incapable of work, and would be a life-long encumbrance to the convent. Then again, on the other hand, the Reverend Mother was always obliged to confess that the young novice was extremely clever, and showed so much taste and skill in whatever she did that she might be of very great use to the convent after all. Finally, the community was obliged to give in, and came to the conclusion that there was no real reason why Anne Catharine should be sent away.

So at last all obstacles had apparently vanished, and the day of profession was to be deferred no longer ; when it was once more rendered doubtful by the conscientious novice herself. Thus far the security she lent Cantor

Sontgen for his ten thalers had never been returned to her, and she feared, with some justice, that she might be called upon for the money by his creditors.

She confided this perplexity to the reverend mother, who soon elicited from the Cantor that he was totally unable to meet the debt. Consequently the community announced their resolution of not allowing Anne Catharine to take the vows until that money was paid, and she herself freed from her obligation. Anne Catharine, nothing daunted, carried her heavy burden to her Lord as usual, praying Him to help her ; but it pleased Him to be deaf to her supplications until she should have exhausted every natural means of procuring the sum. She thus describes her pitiable position : “ I had not a coin in my possession. I appealed for help to my parents and relations, but no one would give me a farthing, not even my brother Bernard ; on the contrary, they all fell upon me, and made a fuss and a storm as if I had committed the greatest crime in the world. The debt, however, had to be paid before I could become a professed nun. So I ceased not to call upon God till He had mercy upon me, and put it into the heart of a good man to make me a present of ten thalers. My brother has often wept since then, to think he was so unkind to me. After this great difficulty was happily removed, and all preparations were made for my profession, yet another difficulty arose ! The reverend mother announced to me and to Clara that there was something still wanting, and that Cantor Sontgen had sent a messenger from Munster to say so, who would wait and take back the three thalers he required. I was terribly upset, for I had not any money at all.

“ In my trouble I went and told my grief to the Abbé Lambert. He gave me two half-thalers, and when I got back to my cell I found six more thalers counted out on the table. Filled with joy and thankfulness, I ran with

them to Clara, who was at her wit's end where to get the money, as she had nothing any more than I had.

"Three years after this I was again in much difficulty about paying for my breakfast, as was the custom in the convent, when one day I discovered two coins placed on my window-sill, which the reverend mother allowed me to keep.

"Eight days before the Feast of the Presentation, the anniversary of the day upon which Clara and I had commenced a novena for our reception into the convent as postulants, we both made our profession in the year 1803, as Augustinian nuns in the convent of St. Agnes at Dülmen, and were accepted by Jesus Christ as His spouses under the rule of our holy patron. I was then nine-and-twenty. After my profession my parents became reconciled to me, and my father and brother paid me a visit, bringing me a present of a piece of linen."

We must not pass over the good Abbé Lambert, above-mentioned, without a word, whom we here meet with for the first time, since he was the final stepping-stone to the fulfilment of Anne Catharine's long-cherished hopes of profession. Originally parish priest in the diocese of Amiens, he was compelled, like many other priests of his nation, to leave his country on refusing to take the infamous constitutional oath, and was given gratuitous lodging in one of the buildings adjacent to the Convent of St. Agnes, in return for saying the daily Mass and hearing confessions. As Anne Catharine held the office of sacristan for some time, she learned to know the good abbé well, and to put great confidence in him, as she witnessed daily the deep devotion and recollection with which he offered up the Holy Sacrifice. Amidst all the secret troubles and interior distress which the hostile spirit of the community and the ignorance shown by the ordinary convent confessor respecting her spiritual condi-

tion occasioned her, she took heart to pour out her soul to the Abbé Lambert, and seek his priestly advice and assistance. As he was, unfortunately, as unacquainted with the German language as she was with the French, their mutual intercourse was considerably limited, and yet the pious intelligent priest soon gained so intimate a knowledge of the young novice's character and inward leadings, that he felt himself bound to do all that lay in his power for so richly-favoured a soul.

He began by persuading the ordinary confessor to give Anne Catharine permission to receive Holy Communion more frequently, and even to command her so to do, when her humility made her hesitate, and was himself always ready to bring the Blessed Eucharist to the fainting exhausted girl the first thing in the morning. Although his own existence was precarious, and might be termed from hand to mouth, nothing pleased him more than when he could induce Anne Catharine to accept a little present from him to relieve her urgent wants, whilst she looked upon him as her greatest earthly benefactor, and eventually tended him in his last sickness with the affection and devotion of a sister.

The mixed feelings of joy and reverential solemnity with which, when the long awaited day arrived, Anne Catharine stood at the foot of the altar to make her vows—those vows for which she had suffered so much and thirsted and pined so long—can better be imagined than described by the feeble power of a human pen. The zeal and desire with which she now prepared herself for this happy moment were the same with which sixteen years ago she had made ready for her first communion.

On the morning of profession, although the preceding days had been devoted to renewed and cruel bodily penances, doubly mortifying to a frame scarcely recovered from the severe illness occasioned by mental care and

distress, she stood up before the others strong and blooming, the rejoicing of her soul at the inexpressible happiness of her rapidly approaching espousals with her Divine Bridegroom, which were about to make her His for ever and ever and ever, communicating itself to her outward appearance. Her whole form seemed radiant; no one could look at her or be near her without rejoicing, and thus it was that her mystical wedding-day was a day of gladsomeness and peace to all about her. The light of deep inward joy shining on her countenance, which the fast-flowing tears had power neither to dim nor to quench, made her so sweet and dear in the eyes of her sisters, and the tender words in which she expressed her eternal gratitude to them for granting her permission to take perpetual vows, were so touching, that the entire community was pervaded for that day with a spirit of peace, love, and happiness.

After the solemn High Mass a breakfast was given, to which Anne Catharine's parents were invited. Never once during all their unkindness and opposition to her entering a convent, had Anne Catharine felt a momentary bitterness against them. She had contented herself with ceaselessly praying to God that He would give those so dear to her strength to acquiesce with all their hearts in her offering of herself to Him. Her prayer was now granted.

The two old people were so profoundly moved at the sight of their child on this joyful day, that they gave her to God with one accord as a cheerful and willing sacrifice. It came home to them quite clearly and plainly that God had called her to this state of life, and they feared to draw down His anger upon themselves, should they longer oppose His manifest will. Thus the universal joy crept into their hearts also, and filled them to overflowing. This gave their daughter yet another reason for

looking back upon this memorable day with grateful thankfulness and consolation.

Henceforth the whole of Anne Catharine's life in the cloister may be summed up in the following declaration, made by her a little while after its suppression, "I had resigned myself utterly into the hands of my heavenly Bridegroom, and He did with me what He willed. To suffer in peace has always seemed the most enviable lot upon earth, but I never could do that." Sufferings, indeed, were never wanting to her, and she received them with thankfulness, as welcome gifts from God's hand ; but to suffer in private, in a quiet solitude, where no eye should observe her, never fell to her lot ; and how should it have done so, since she was destined to a complete conformity with her Spouse, Who had to bear His own sorrows amidst perpetual turmoil, strife of tongues, exterior trials, and persecutions ?

All the pains and sicknesses with which her childhood was visited by her own request, had had a deep mystical signification, whether as expiation for the sins of others, and reparation to God, or as the simple bearing of the burdens of others from motives of pure charity. From the date of her confirmation, and again from that of her solemn profession as a nun, these sufferings gradually assumed a higher and higher character and a wider extension. The maladies of the great body of the Church, the spiritual faults, the want of order and discipline, the imperfect following of the evangelical counsels by dignitaries and religious holding high and influential positions, were laid upon her, to bear and to expiate by various forms of disease, and by mental as well as physical anguish. Herein she followed closely in the footprints of the Blessed Lidwina of Schiedam, who, like the miraculous Christina of St. Trond, was one of the most wonderful

instruments of atonement for sin of whom God has ever made use on behalf of His Church.

Besides her severe sufferings at the heart, which to the day of her death continued unabated in intensity, she had unintermitting illnesses of the most alarming and manifold natures : there was hardly an inch in her whole body healthy and free from pain. She had given all to God, every nerve, every muscle, every drop of blood, every breath she drew ; and He had graciously accepted the gift, and now employed them all in His service, in a way of His own, a way by which strength and vitality were slowly ruined by disease and anguish, and the natural life consumed in a pain which burnt and devoured like a flame.

Her body resembled a vessel suspended over a fire, in which the Divine Physician, in the orderings of His vast love and justice, widely different from the narrow compass of human knowledge, prepared healing medicines for His entire flock. Not only physically did Anne Catharine suffer, her whole mental system was martyred by every sensation of pain to which the soul in its inseparable union with the body is susceptible :—terror, anguish, grief, oppression, dereliction, aridity, desolation, languor ; every wound and bitter smart which the passions of a fellow-creature are capable of inflicting upon another, or the cunning and malice of the devil can cause to the soul, were permitted to do their utmost against her. The appalling sense of guilt and the trembling with fear which accompanies the dying bed, the mortal anguish of the poor sinner whose soul is on the eve of leaving the body to stand before its judge, were laid upon her in all their horror ; yes, and even that terrible condition of mental alienation, the consequence of the fiery passions, hate, revenge, impatience, sensuality, and curiosity, she

had to take upon her own devoted shoulders. She had to fight these out and overcome them, in order to impetrate the grace of repentance, or of a good death for the sinner.

Fearful as are all these sources of agony to contemplate, the martyrdom of love she endured for her heavenly Bridegroom, for His Church, and for all those treasures of grace and mercy scorned and trodden under foot by His own creatures, surpassed them all. Her greatest sufferings were those occasioned by the knowledge she possessed of the unutterable degradation and humiliation which was being prepared at this time for God's priesthood by its own unworthy members, unbelievers in the great truths of eternal salvation, and opposers alike of their own salvation and that of others. Although perhaps Anne Catharine's bodily sufferings do not appear to us so outwardly violent and terrible as those of St. Lidwina, they were no less deep, piercing, and continuous. It often happened that she contemplated herself and her pitiful condition as though she were observing some other person, when she would break out into involuntary bursts of compassion, exclaiming, "Ah! see, there is that little nun again with the pierced heart! she must be about my own age, but she has far worse sufferings than I, so I must complain no more!" As the blood flows from the heart, and after passing through all the veins returns to its original source, as though there to seek new life to start forth again on its endless course, so did her pains extend from her heart throughout every member of her body, returning to their fountain-head, in order only, as it seemed, to throb and quiver in every limb with yet greater intensity. One kind of unknown sickness succeeded another without intermission, and as to each one she was instructed in a vision why it was laid upon her, in order that her merit

might be increased by its free acceptance. This gave her the supernatural knowledge of what she had to do, but the work itself had to be accomplished through the ordinary paths and circumstances of every-day life.

In these visions she beheld the meaning of each pain and its connexion with the state of the Church. But her ordinary daily life frequently came between them with so crude and startling an opposition, that exterior occurrences were often harder to bear than the heaviest interior trials. And yet these troublesome every-day occurrences were but the ceaseless completion or supplement of the latter, and were taken into account by Almighty God, down to the most insignificant and apparently casual circumstances. Her mission would have been faulty and imperfect had it not been rounded and worked out by the distractions, woes, contradictions, and helplessness of daily life provided for her in the forethought of God Himself. The patient enduring and persevering overcoming of all external hindrances, the conscientious fulfilment of all obligations and duties entailed upon her by her condition or by the exigencies of those around her, from whom her great interior sufferings were partially concealed and utterly impossible of comprehension, were precisely the means by which her humility, simplicity, and virtue were preserved intact. Her whole life in the convent, and afterwards until her death, would be an insoluble enigma to us, or a thing of no meaning, if we were to lose sight of this ordinance of God in the guidance of a soul so marvellously gifted.

"I had," she once confessed, "to suffer much through doctors and physic for what was incurable by their art. Often I was brought very near death, for the medicines they gave me were always much too strong and powerful for me ; but although I knew beforehand what harm they would do me, obedience commanded me to take them.

If I ever neglected to do so, being far away in spirit at the time, the suspicion immediately arose that I did it on purpose, and was merely pretending to be ill. Then the medicines were so dear, and often I had hardly got half-way through one bottle that had cost very, very dear, before another prescription was ordered me. The cost of these I had to pay myself, and how I managed to do so I cannot understand, for the money always came. I certainly did a great deal of sewing, but the work was for the support of the house. Towards the end of the time the convent gave me half towards the account. I was often so wretchedly ill that I could do nothing for myself; and then it often happened that my sisters forgot all about me; but God provided for me in other ways. Once I was lying in a cold sweat, and falling from one fainting fit into another, when two nuns entered my cell, made my bed, lifted me back again, and tucked me up so gently and tenderly that I felt quite refreshed. After a time, the reverend mother and one of the sisters came in, and asked me, quite surprised, who had made me so comfortable? I thought by this question they must have done it themselves, and so thanked them for their kindness. However, they declared positively that neither they nor any of the other nuns had been in my cell, and were persuaded that my story of two nuns, dressed in our habit, having made my bed, was all a dream; but the fact was unmistakeable—my bed had been made, and I was wonderfully refreshed.

“Later on I got to know those two nuns, who often showed me great love and kindness: they were beatified souls who had formerly lived in our convent. Another time, when they were doing me a similar service, one of my sisters came in suddenly, and beholding me lifted up from my bed, lying on my back in the air without any visible support, she made such a screaming and fuss that

I fell to the ground with fear, and hurt myself. In consequence of this a great talk was made in the convent, and I was perpetually teased with questions by the older nuns as to how I managed to lie in the air like that ; but I could not tell them, for I never thought much about such things, they came so naturally to me."

In order, however, that Anne Catharine's poor feeble body should not be utterly consumed in the fiery furnace of her pain, God deigned to send her mitigation from time to time in the shape of supernatural medicines, for an account of which we are indebted to some of the relations of her life which she was compelled to give to her directors under obedience to the un mistakeable commands of her spiritual guide. These narratives are short and incomplete, but they suffice to show us that in this again she resembled St. Lidwina, and was given the same sources of healing.

"All physic," she says, "that did me any good was supernatural. The medicine the doctor brought almost cost me my life, but yet I was forced to take it, and pay dearly for it ; however, God found the money, which never grew less. Everything I asked Him for He gave me—for myself, and also many things for the good of the convent. These medicines I sometimes received from my guide,¹ sometimes from my heavenly Bridegroom, or from my Mother Mary and the saints. Sometimes they were given me in small, clear, shining flasks ; at others they were in the form of flowers, buds, or herbs. At the head of my bed there was a wooden shelf, and on this shelf the miraculous medicines used to be laid. Often I discovered tiny, fragrant, green sprigs close to me in the bed, or after I had a vision, or else placed in my hand. As I felt the delicate leaves I knew how I was to use them. They either strengthened me by their sweet scent,

¹ The good angel.

or else I was to eat them, or sometimes to pour water over them and drink it afterwards. I was always immensely refreshed, and fit for any work, after this, and this strength sometimes lasted for a shorter or a longer time.

“ I also received pictures, figures, or a kind of stone, and as they approached me I learnt what I was to do with each one. Sometimes these gifts were laid in the palm of my hand or upon my breast, and gave me instant strength and refreshment. Occasionally I was permitted to keep these presents, and to cure others with them ; now and then I employed them upon others or gave them away, but I never told how they came into my possession. All these things are present and actual events of my life ; but how they happen I cannot explain. I only know that they came to me as realities, and I made use of them as realities to the glory of Him Who sent them to me out of His pity.

“ Once, when a novice, I was kneeling in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament with outstretched arms ; and as I knelt, I found a beautiful picture of St. Catharine in my hand, apparently painted on parchment. I kept it a long time, till I gave it to a good girl who begged me for a remembrance, and who wanted to be a nun, but could not accomplish it. When the poor child died, that picture was found lying upon her breast in the coffin.

“ In another illness I received from my heavenly Bridegroom a stone of about the size of a crown-piece, shaped like a heart, and transparent, in which was to be seen a picture of the Mother of God with the Child, in red, blue, and gold. The picture was very delicately drawn, and so refreshing to the eye that it quite cured me. I wrapped it up in a little leathern bag, and carried it about my person for a long time, until it was withdrawn from me. Some time later He gave me a ring, placing it Himself on my finger. The ring was formed of one precious

stone, on which was graven the likeness of Our Lady, and I was allowed to keep it for a long while. Finally He withdrew it Himself from my finger. St. Augustin gave me once a similar present. It was upon his feast, and I was lying in bed in great pain. The hour drew near in which all the community were wont to go to Holy Communion. No one thought that I could possibly get up and go with them. I, however, felt as if I were called to the church, and I went and received the Holy Eucharist with the rest. After that I fell into a faint, and was brought back to my cell, I knew not how, and laid dressed upon my bed. Here St. Augustin appeared to me and gave me a transparent brilliant stone, the size of a bean, on the outside of which a red heart and a little cross were carved. He told me at the same time that my heart must shine as brightly as that stone. When I awoke, there it was in my hand. I laid it in a glass full of water, and then drank the water, which cured my illness. As soon as I had recovered the stone disappeared.

“Another time, when I was suffering too great pain to move from my bed, I was permitted to keep one of these divine gifts for more than seven months. At this time I could not swallow any sort of food, and it was a wonder to those about me how I kept alive; they brought me everything they could think of, but I could not eat.

“All the time I was fed by another kind of food, namely, a likeness of the Blessed Virgin, which I found in my hand one morning when I woke. It was in the form of a great white shining Host, only thicker and softer, on which letters were imprinted and the picture of our Gracious Lady. It had a sweet perfume, and at night was quite bright and glittering. I kept it hidden in my bed, and every day ate a tiny portion of it during seven months, which always strengthened me wonderfully. It tasted very sweet, but not with the same sweet-

ness as the Blessed Sacrament. At last it vanished, and I was quite distressed at losing so heavenly a manna.

“One night, when I was kneeling by the table in my cell praying to Mary, I saw a brightly-shining lady glide through the door (which was shut), and kneel down as though to pray, on the other side of the table. I was startled, but I went on calmly with my prayers. Thereupon the kneeling figure laid down before me a little white, shining image of the Mother of God, resting her hand upon the table beside it for some little time. I drew back timidly, when she pushed the picture nearer to me and disappeared, leaving it lying on the table. It was a Madonna, standing upright with the Child in her arms. It was unspeakably beautiful, and seemed as though painted on ivory. I carried it about my person, filled with reverent love towards it for a long time, until inwardly admonished to give it to a foreign priest, from whom it was withdrawn at his death.

“Our Lady once gave me also a wonderful flower, which opened when placed in water. When shut it resembled a rose-bud, but when open it unrolled a number of delicate leaves, each of a different colour, and each having a distinct spiritual action, the working of which I was to experience through this flower. Its perfume was delicious. I was bidden to put it in my drinking-glass, and to drink the water it was in for rather more than a month. Finally I grew anxious where to place this treasure, that it should not be desecrated, and I received an interior command to make a new crown for Our Lady’s statue in the convent chapel, and to weave this flower in the crown. When I told this to the reverend mother and to my confessor, they advised me to save up my money and put off executing the order for the present. Nevertheless, I had been bidden not to delay, and so, with the confessor’s consent, I ordered the crown to be made at the Poor

Clares' Convent at Munster, and placed the flower in it myself. The Sister who had charge of Our Lady's statue not being very scrupulous about its arrangement, I took the crown into my own charge. The flower remained therein until the suppression of the convent, when it disappeared, and I saw in a vision that it had been removed to another place.

"Another time I remember receiving a little flask of balsam from my good angel ; the balsam was white and thick, like oil. It cured me of a deep wound I had received from the falling upon me of a basketful of wet linen, and I was able to heal many poor sick people with it also."

CHAPTER XII.

Convent Life.

THE accident alluded to in the previous chapter had nearly cost Anne Catharine her life. One of the many laborious works which sorely overtasked her feeble strength was that of washing the linen ; and one day, as she was helping a lay-sister to lift up a heavy basket attached to a pulley, the Sister carelessly let the rope slip, and the basket fell with its whole weight upon Anne Catharine's left hip, throwing her violently to the ground. This accident so bruised and shook her whole frame, that, had not God miraculously preserved her life, she must inevitably have succumbed. Besides the actual pain of

the hip, all those other sufferings which she endured for others grew inordinately at the same time, and her daily-increasing lameness and weakness became, by God's will, the occasion of her bearing fresh humiliations and ill-usage for His sake.

It was now as much as she could do to assist the convent-sacristan, and ringing the bell became to her an extreme labour, often quite an impossibility, in which case she was accused of laziness and pride. In fact, not to ring the bell was a sore privation to her, since this duty was to her so suggestive of prayer that its fulfilment would bring her total forgetfulness, for the time being, of her terrible pains.

"I had," she once observed, "ever the joyful feeling, when I rang a consecrated bell, that I was showering blessings all around, and calling upon all men, far and near, to praise and glorify God. I united my prayers and sighs to each sound of the bell, that it might chase all evil thoughts out of the hearts of those who heard it, and arouse them to the love of God. I longed to ring the bell beyond the time prescribed." And we can hardly fail to see in this sweet devotion of the meek, humble little nun, amidst her many sufferings, an atonement for the wild wickedness of those infidel times, so soon to vent its rage by an almost incomprehensible persecution of the custom of ringing blessed bells.

Equally painful, and at times impossible, now became her other laborious avocations, such as working in the fields or garden, washing, mangling, and ironing the altar linen, and the priest's vestments. God only knows with what superhuman exertions she strove to get up the church linen in spite of her nearly intolerable anguish; and how He rewarded her for this zeal in His service will be seen from the following circumstance.

As Anne Catharine was ironing an alb one day, in

company with some other Sisters, the red-hot steel fell out of its sheath upon the alb. In terror lest this should be burnt, she seized the glowing steel in her bare hand, invoking God in one short prayer, and laid it upon the ground, into which it immediately burnt a large hole ; but neither her flesh nor the alb were so much as scorched. And yet her hands were so delicate and so wasted from the incessant pain she suffered in them that she herself once was heard to say : “ Whilst I was in the convent my hands were always very full of pain. I used to hold them up in the sunlight, and they were so thin the light shone right through them in rays.”

The preparing of the altar breads was now a heavy toil to her in consequence of the weight of the iron mould ; and this work was to her so sacred that she ever did it amidst much prayer and with deepest reverence. Once, at the moment in which the new hosts should have been baked, she lay grievously ill in bed, sorely saddened at being forced to postpone this work. So she took heart, prayed fervently to God, dragged herself painfully from her bed and into the chapel, where she renewed her prayers before the Blessed Sacrament for strength to prepare the hosts. Soon she felt herself bathed in perspiration, but strong enough to get through her work, in which her angel helped her. No sooner was it ended than she was as ill as before, and it required her greatest effort to reach her cell again.

After the fall of the heavy basket the pains about her heart increased violently, and she frequently brought up of a sudden large quantities of blood whilst at her work, until the sisters were terrified lest she should bleed to death. When, however, the latter found that she recovered from deadly sickness sufficient strength in the space of a few minutes to go on with her work, they came to the conclusion that her illnesses were of no moment, and that

whatever agony she might appear to be suffering, no harm would finally come of it.

After such a conclusion the melancholy plight of the invalid may easily be imagined. The nuns at last took scarcely any heed whether Anne Catharine were for days together in her cell unable to leave her bed, or amongst them. Thus they left her, often in the bitterest winter-weather, to shiver on her cold straw pallet, with hardly a covering to protect her chilled frame ; or else, if it were summer-time, lying helpless in a burning fever, sighing in vain for a draught of fresh water, which no one thought of taking to her.

A compassionate soul in Dulmen, hearing one day of her misery, brought her condition before the notice of the Duke of Croatia, who thereupon gave orders for the institution of an infirmary in the convent, and for Anne Catharine's removal thereto. The duke made enquiries as to the usual management of invalids, when the fact came out that the treatment poor Anne Catharine had received was simply inhuman. The doctor stated that he had once found her, after violent fever and perspiration, shivering on her bed ; no change of linen had been given her, and the sheets and her own clothes, which had been drenched through and through with perspiration, frozen and as stiff as boards. There were no means of warming the wretched little cell, and in rainy weather the walls literally ran down with moisture. If at the command of her confessor she made a timid complaint about this her pitiable condition to the reverend mother, she was looked upon as a nuisance, so thoroughly were all turned against her, thinking her a burthen on account of her perpetual illnesses and inability to pay the costs of her medicines. Sometimes she was told that the convent was too poor to supply comforts to an invalid ; at others, that she was always grumbling.

She endured untold miseries from one of the sisters who had the charge of attending upon her, the sister, either through neglect or caprice, employing the time allotted to her for nursing poor Anne Catharine in working for herself, or else in covering her with abuse for lying idly in bed and giving so much trouble. It will hardly be credited that this was the very nun whom Anne Catharine had nursed through an infectious illness, as before related, when, owing to her cross-grained ways, not one of the others would go near her. But so it was ; and now that Anne Catharine was receiving evil for the good she had done, she no less thankfully welcomed the occasion of suffering for her Lord, and not only bore the unkindnesses of this sister with her usual unvarying sweetness and forgiveness, but treated her with yet greater affection than she had ever yet shown her.

When the poor girl had sufficiently recovered to be able to leave her bed and take her place in choir and at work, the only earthly nourishment for which she felt inclined was tea or weak coffee. After many sleepless nights, when she could scarcely stand, so weak and trembling was her frame, and when her head swam with giddiness, after she had drunk a little coffee and heard Mass her strength returned to her, and she was able to get through her usual duties. On this her companions jeered at her, declaring her illness to be all a make-believe, or a fancy and exaggeration.

There was a custom in the convent that the nuns should provide for their own breakfast. As, however, Anne Catharine possessed neither coffee nor money with which to buy any, she used to carry her little tin can down to the kitchen of a morning and collect the coffee-grounds, which the others had thrown away as refuse, and make a drink from these, which, without sugar or milk, formed her meal. Upon this her meagre fare's coming to

the knowledge of Clara Sontgen, she took pity on her, and shared her own breakfast with her old friend for a time. Not for long, however, since by her own avowal the others soon dissuaded her from showing poor Anne Catharine this little kindness.

Another means of help then presented itself. As Anne Catharine returned one morning from the choir, she found two pieces of money laid upon the window-sill. These the Superior allowed her to keep, and they sufficed to provide her with coffee for a long time. When this fund had exhausted itself, a benefactor made her a present of two pounds of coffee-berries, which supplied her with breakfast for a full year.

By the side of her actual, pressing destitution, and the ceaseless sufferings she received at the hands of her immediate companions, the contrast between her abjection within the walls of the convent and the esteem in which she was held by those without, is a striking feature in the history of her life. All classes of persons came to her, seeking help for their wants and for their sins. The more forlorn and the more critical their state, the more certain were they of receiving sympathy and loving aid from the feeble suffering little nun. The greatness of her own pains appeared to increase tenfold her tender pity for the infinitely smaller sufferings brought to her notice, whilst she, who was accustomed to the lack of all care, and knew not what it was to meet with the most trivial attention, found it impossible to place a limit to her zeal when the mitigation of the woes of others was in question.

She *felt* what would give them relief; she saw in a moment the nature and seat of the evil, knew what remedies to advise, and breathed peace and a blessing upon all that she touched with those wan, transparent hands, which were ever outstretched to pray or to heal. She was always to be found so cheerful and patient, with such

pleasant, consoling words ever on her lips, and such a ready, sympathetic attention for the grumbles and complaints which the most irritable and discontented of invalids poured in her ear, that the latter were too apt to forget that she herself never, in the whole course of her life, knew what it was to be for one moment free from pain !

Amongst the pensioners of the convent was a poor half-witted girl, who had a bad ulcer in the neck, and who resisted all attempts of the doctor to dress it or to prescribe a remedy. The reverend mother, therefore, brought her to Anne Catharine. Immediately the girl became perfectly docile, allowed Anne Catharine to examine and bind up the wound, used regularly any ointment which she gave her, and, when the sore broke, brought it to Anne Catharine to be dressed, who applied her lips to the wound and heroically sucked the matter from it. From that day it rapidly healed, without further pain or trouble. A maid-servant, too, who had an abscess under her arm, slipped out of bed one night and came into Anne Catharine's cell, begging her to dress it for her.

Another case brought to her notice was that of a young girl, who was of such an unbearable temper that no one could live with her in the convent. None but Anne Catharine knew how to manage her ; with her she was always gentle, and would cling to her with a warmth of affection utterly incomprehensible to the others, until finally Anne Catharine's prayers and persuasions completely altered her ways, and she became as amiable as she had formerly been the reverse.

We will listen to what she says herself of a similar case. " The doctor of the convent, who was rather rough and harsh in his manner, was attending a poor woman with a bad finger, which had caused the whole of her arm to swell and turn black ; and because she had neglected it he was very angry, and threatened to amputate the finger.

Hereupon the poor thing came, white with terror, to tell me of this, and to beg me to help her. So I prayed for her till the way to cure her came into my mind. I sent for the reverend mother, who gave me leave to doctor the poor woman in Fr. Lambert's study. I took there some salves and myrrh and mother-wort, and mixed them in a little wine and water ; to these I added some holy water, then I made a wet bandage of the decoction, and wrapped it round the bad arm. God must have shown me the remedy Himself, for on the following morning all the swelling had gone down ; and although the finger was still painful, the throbbing ceased after I had bathed it in hot buck-ashes,¹ and I discovered a great thorn to be the cause of the evil, which I extracted, and the woman got quite well."

In speaking of the nature of her compassion towards the sick and dying, she says : " I can never pity those who die peacefully ; nor a child who suffers patiently ; for to suffer in patience is the state most to be envied whilst we remain in these sinful bodies. Our pity is rarely pure ; for it is generally mingled with weakness or with our natural shrinking from suffering. The only pure compassion was that of our Lord for mankind, and no human compassion can be pure but by uniting itself with that compassion. Those whom I do pity are sinners—wretched beings led away by delusions, and gradually brought by them into despair. And, ah, alas ! too often have I had far too much compassion for my unworthy self."

The blessings which followed upon Anne Catharine's prayers were not confined to human beings only, as the following circumstance will show. She states that at one time "there was an epidemic amongst the cattle in the town, and they were dying on all sides ; so one poor

¹ Aschenlauge.

woman came crying to me, and begged me to pray for her and for the others who were likely to be ruined if this went on. As I prayed, the stalls where all these cows stood came before me ; I saw the healthy and the diseased animals ; and at the same time I saw the cause of the evil and the effects of my prayers for its cure. Many of them were ill as a punishment and a warning from God for the pride and presumptuous security of their owners, who did not consider that God can both give and take away. So I prayed that He might bring them into a right way of thinking by some other means.

“Other cows I saw were ill on account of the envy and greed of their masters, and for their neglecting to give thanks to God for His gifts, and to ask His blessing upon their possessions. I beheld a sort of dark, uncanny shadow hovering around these cows, which taught me that God’s blessing is not merely a descent of His grace, but that it also drives off all the wicked designs of the Evil One. The cows which were spared on account of prayer I noticed to be separated from the others by something light and shining, and, as the cure was being effected, a dark vapour exuded from their bodies, and afterwards over the heads of those that were healed through prayer I noticed a gentle, tiny flame hovering in the air. Suddenly I perceived the plague to come to a stand-still ; it did not touch, by so much as one breath, the cow belonging to the poor woman who came to me for prayers.”

Another time no less than twenty-six parishes came to seek her assistance, which were in great poverty owing to disease amongst their cattle. She began to pray, and, as usual, was soon rapt in contemplation. She related afterwards that she beheld Jesus Christ walking in Galilee, with six of His disciples, on a bright star-light summer’s night. As she drew near to adore Him, she found herself surrounded by innumerable flocks of cows, sheep, and

goats. She tried to collect the cows together, but they always escaped either to one side or the other, and gave her endless trouble. The curious part of this, as it seemed to her, was that these animals belonged to Jesus and His disciples, and one of the latter told Anne Catharine to bring them in to a stable which He would show her. This stable resembled in every detail the inn where the Magi rested during their journey from the East. The next day she was bidden to remove the cattle again, and to drive them into her own country.

The journey did not seem longer than from Dulmen to Coesfeld, but she did not follow the usual road. She had the greatest trouble to keep the cows together and to get them along. She tried to drive them in couples, but lost a great number by the way. They were sometimes fierce also, and turned upon her, threatening to toss her with their great horns, and unless the saints and the prayers of living persons had aided her, she thought she could never have got through her task. She then conducted the cattle to places where they were expected, and where the parish priests came forward to receive them.

Her angel explained this vision to her subsequently, as follows. The animals signified the graces she had obtained by her prayers for the twenty-six parishes. Her finding them in the Promised Land was to signify that in that country there remain still many of the merits and graces of Jesus and of the Apostles, which are lost because no one seeks for them, and which she recovered, and conducted, so to say, towards those who desired her prayers.

The cows straying away meant certain parish priests who were negligent in prayer, or who prayed tepidly, and received no graces ; whilst the zealous priests were typified by those who went straightforward to their goal, which

goal was grace. She had to make up for the lukewarm prayers by the most fatiguing bodily exertions. Thus we see how the requests Anne Catharine made on behalf of others in her visions were merited by her own toils, which were needed in order to make satisfaction for the sins of those who would enjoy the fruits of her prayer. Although these toilsome journeys were mystical in one sense, yet in another sense they were actual, since they were effected in the superior state of ecstasy, and were an essential and positive action, with real and sensible results, and left the same impressions of fatigue and lassitude upon the body as if it had really undergone the exertions of an arduous journey.

In the same way Anne Catharine's spiritual works were likewise effected under the form of all kinds of manual and agricultural labour—namely, in that which concerned fields, gardens, and the care of flocks. The condition of penury and severe distress in which were many districts, dioceses, and even entire countries, was shown to her in pictures which corresponded to the divers kinds of labour she mystically performed.

During the whole of one month she suffered unspeakable torments, caused by mortal illnesses, which succeeded each other without intermission. Finally, one night she had a series of visions, the one connected with the other, concerning her illnesses and the works she would have to undertake.

“I saw all this,” she said, “in a great field, where there yet remained one untilled corner, surrounded by a thick quickset hedge, covered with roses.² I saw myself also represented in different positions. I was sometimes in a chapel, sometimes upon a cross, sometimes upon a rock, in a bog or amongst thorn-bushes, and nearly smothered

² Roses and all flowers were invariably symbols of suffering with Anne Catharine.

amidst flowers and thorns ; sometimes transpierced by arrows and lances. Once a fiery dance was performed upon my body by creatures that seemed all wings and feathers : a symbol of fever. Terrible-looking shapes, like globes of different colours, which unrolled themselves and burst into flame upon me, emitted a burning vapour, typifying convulsions. After this I kept crossing dangerous precipices, upon bridges covered with roses and flowers of all sorts, suffering great pains of body at the same time in the stead of certain sick persons who had asked for my prayers.

“ I endured tortures of every kind, and saw the sick instantly healed. I saw poor people, who know no one and who can write to no one, and yet require the intercession of other Christians more frequently than those who have friends and who can write letters ; and sufferers from gout were constantly before my eyes.”

We find another instance of the personal suffering involved by Anne Catharine’s loving helpfulness to others. This happened rather later in her life, and shows how dear her acts of charity cost her.

“ Last night,” she relates, “ I was in such agony that I thought I must die ; and as no one came near me to give me any assistance, I offered my sufferings to God for all who were sick and neglected and for all who were dying without help, consolation, or the sacraments. I was wide awake, and suddenly beheld innumerable heart-rending scenes around me. Some from this neighbourhood, others from far away ; in fact, all over the face of the earth I beheld visions of miserable, sunken, forlorn creatures dying of disease or want, without priest or sacraments, in prison, huts, caves, in the dungeons of ships, in deserts, in the garrets and the cellars of great towns, I felt an ardent yearning to help them, and implored God to show me how to do so. He replied : ‘ Thou canst not

help them for nothing ; it will need great labour.' I resigned myself into His hands, and soon found myself in a terrible condition. Ropes were bound tightly round my arms, legs, and neck, and were then drawn so tightly that I felt as though every member and limb of my body were being dragged asunder. The cord round my throat almost strangled me, my tongue stiffened, and the bones of my chest were convulsed almost to dislocation. Whilst I lay thus agonizing I beheld many of the unfortunates receiving succour."

These sufferings lasted many days, and even increased in intensity. Anne Catharine was literally crucified as she lay. Her confessor visiting her soon after, found her with her neck and tongue terribly swollen, and her condition rendered doubly painful by the frequent vomitings to which she was subject.

These perpetual illnesses made it out of the question for Anne Catharine to undertake any one fixed post in the convent, and therefore she was ordered to assist first one and then another of the lay-sisters. Thus she found the exact fulfilment of the wish she had expressed on her entry into the community—namely, that they would consider her as the least amongst them. It never once happened to her to be placed in authority over any other being, but rather, as Clara Sontgen testified, "she was the servant of all, without once seeming so much as vexed or annoyed at it ; her whole aim was to give satisfaction, and do what was required of her. She was not only gentle and amiable to us, but was kindness itself to the servants and workpeople who came about the convent, often rendering them little services and good words of advice at the same time."

Even the reverend mother, whose treatment of Anne Catharine was far from being what it should have been, was forced to allow that "she was extremely conscien-

tious and punctual with her work ; and after I had given her the charge of the garden, her care and industry for the good of the convent was deserving of the highest praise. Towards all the workpeople she showed extreme kindness, but at the same time thought it her duty to keep a watch over their faults. To their poverty and want she was always very compassionate. I have often known her make clothes for poor children out of the old church furniture that has been thrown aside."

Thus, whenever a direct question was asked about Anne Catharine, we find the invariable answer of sisters and Superior to be in her favour ; they could speak no ill of her, since all her works were good—and yet how hardly they treated her ! Such an anomaly would be scarcely credible were it not that owing to her soul's being cast in so widely different a mould from their own, they could not understand her, and, alas ! for poor human nature, there is but a step, as daily experience proves, between the non-comprehension of the superiority of another and an unreasoning jealousy, which one breath may fan into hate !

CHAPTER XIII.

Interior Life.

OF all the deprivations which Anne Catharine had to bear, none was more grievous to her than the want of a firm, reliable spiritual guidance. She had no confessor with whom she could take intimate counsel over her interior state and experiences : she was forced to bear her heavy burden alone, for there was not one soul near her who could lighten it for her by a wise, intelligent direction. She says herself : “ I often cried aloud to God, and besought Him to send me a priest to whom I could lay bare my whole self ; for I was often in dire anxiety lest all I saw and felt should be a delusion of the devil. I was so tormented by doubt that I rejected everything which I saw, felt, and suffered, and that which ordinarily was my strength and consolation from the fear of being deceived.

“ The good Abbé Lambert tried his best to pacify me, but as I felt it impossible to make him thoroughly acquainted with all that happened to me, on account of his slight knowledge of German, my distress and my doubts returned more forcibly than ever. The operations which take place in my soul, and by my means, would have been incomprehensible to myself, a poor ignorant peasant girl, had I not been accustomed to these experiences from my earliest childhood, and had I ever lived in any other atmosphere, so to speak. But in the last four years of

my convent life, I remained in an unbroken series of visions and such like things, of which state it was utterly impossible to give an account to people who had never been brought in contact with things of the sort, and who even disbelieved in their existence.

“One day, in my desolation, I cried for help to God in the church, kneeling there quite alone, and I heard these words—words which stirred my inmost soul—spoken aloud and quite distinctly: ‘Am I, then, not sufficient for Thee?’ When these ecstasies came over me, try as I would, I could not conceal them entirely from the others, and one day I was in the choir, although not joining in the office, and I suddenly became rigid and motionless, and fell to the ground; the nuns raised me up, and as they were carrying me to my cell, I saw a nun in a white and brown habit in the roof of the church, standing, where no mortal could have stood, and I knew that it was St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi, who had the stigmata. I saw her another time walking along the grating of the choir, and a third time on the top of the altar, from which she seemed to push away the priest’s hand whilst he was saying Mass. These dangerous places showed me that I must take great heed how I walked in my own state, lest I should fall, as I had to go alone.

“At first the sisters used to scold me when they found me lying on my face with outstretched arms in the church, as they knew nothing of what was passing within me; and as this happened without my knowing anything about it, I chose out hidden corners for my prayer, where the others could not easily see me. But to no avail! for without being conscious how, I was transported, sometimes here, sometimes there, always flat on my face, or else kneeling with outstretched arms. Thus, at least, the convent chaplain used to find me.

“I had a great longing to see St. Teresa, because I had

heard she had had always so much to suffer with her confessors. And often I did see her writing at a table, or in her bed, looking very weak and ill ; and I always fancied I perceived a great resemblance between her and St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi.

“When occupied over my duties as sacristan, I was often lifted up suddenly into the roof of the church and placed upon high places—the framework of windows, tops of pillars, and other places to which, by human means, it would have been impossible to reach. I scrambled about there quite easily, feeling myself invisibly supported the while, cleaning and polishing and dusting, without having the least fear ; for from childhood I had been used to the assistance of my good angel. Sometimes when I came to myself again, I found myself sitting on the chest where I kept the altar things ; sometimes hidden in a corner behind the altar, where no one could see me, were they ever so close to it. I cannot imagine how I got down thence without tearing my habit, for there was scarcely room to pass.”

Anne Catharine’s ecstasies generally overtook her, according to Overberg, when she was alone, for she continually prayed to God that she might not have these fainting fits, as she called them, in the presence of others. At times, however, they would overtake her in the refectory or garden, when she fell prostrate and so remained, perfectly stiff and motionless.

Someone once asked how she distinguished these kind of faints from those produced by weaknesses, and she replied : “In fainting-fits from weakness I feel very ill, and suffer so much pain in my body that it seems as if I must be going to die. In the others, I do not feel conscious of my body at all, and am, oh ! so happy, and then again quite sad ! I feel a great joy at those times in God’s great mercifulness towards sinners, in that He goes so far

to seek them out and win them back again, lovingly receiving and welcoming them ! and then I am sorrowful on account of the sins by which God's majesty is so fearfully outraged.

“ It often seems to me, too, as if heaven were opened before me and I saw God ; whilst I myself am walking along a little narrow plank, on both sides of which is a deep, dark, bottomless abyss. Once all was dark—above, below, and around me, and I was in great distress, when a bright youth came towards me, took me by the hand, and led me on across the narrow part. At the time I was in such dryness and anxiety, God often repeated to me the comforting words : ‘ My grace is sufficient for thee ’—whispering them sweetly, so sweetly, into my ear !”

It happened frequently that Anne Catharine received the command from her angel, when in these ecstasies, to reprove the other nuns for their neglect of the rule. With unfaltering obedience she stood before them, and weeping heavily, discoursed to them of those portions of the rule—such as silence, obedience, poverty, prayer, and domestic discipline—which were the most frequently neglected or infringed. Often she threw herself at the feet of some sister in whose heart she detected the workings of hatred or dislike arising, imploring her pardon and love, by which means she assisted her in crushing out the evil disposition, and recognizing its injustice before it had had time to rise to the surface.” Such humble prayers had frequently the effect of inspiring the nuns with the irresistible impulse to seek Anne Catharine and lay bare the innermost thoughts of their souls to her, with all the secret malice and ill-will they had nurtured against herself, and to ask her advice as to their faults and omissions. Soon, however, they vacillated, fell back again from their good inspirations, and giving way anew to their old insidious temptations to ill-humour and suspicion whenever they

found Anne Catharine's advice too troublesome to follow when she counselled the practice of imperative mortification and self-denial.

"I was often present in spirit with the sisters," she says, "when my body was confined to my bed or occupied in some work elsewhere, and saw and heard what they said and did, just as I often found myself in the church before the Blessed Sacrament, although I knew I had never left my cell."

From the day Anne Catharine entered the convent her sufferings never appeared to her worthy of a moment's comparison with the deep happiness of living under the same roof with the Blessed Sacrament, and of passing a considerable portion of the day in Its presence. In whatever part of the convent she might be, whether in her cell or busied over some manual labour, her body involuntarily turned itself in the direction of the tabernacle in the convent chapel, whilst the recollection of our Lord's Presence never left her for an instant. Neither distance nor the thickness of the walls could veil It from her eyes; for the strength of her desires kept her incessantly in a state of supernatural vision, and had not obedience imposed a bridle on the impetuosity of her soul, she would have ever lain corporally on the altar steps whilst working in spirit amongst the sisters or in her cell.

In all the things imposed upon her by the observance of the Rule, she knew how to find a reference to the Blessed Sacrament, and therefore she fulfilled the meanest and most trivial offices with the same fidelity and conscientiousness as greater duties. But the duties which were above all dear and sacred in her estimation were those of sacristan. She thought herself only too favoured could she attend to them amidst the greatest bodily anguish, for she knew that then she was serving the King of Kings, and that the very angels envied her her task.

Her whole self was absorbed in the Blessed Sacrament ; literally with body and soul she turned towards her Lord therein, as flowers turn to the sun, with every thought and feeling, with every aspiration and desire of her heart, offering to Him every breath she drew with its sweet-smelling perfume of love and suffering.

Great as her love were her sorrows about the Blessed Sacrament, for there was not a sin on the face of the earth since its creation which cried louder to heaven for vengeance than those committed in the age in which she lived by the persecution of all who made open profession of their religious belief in the Real Presence of the Most Holy. At the very time when a flame of love was burning in Anne Catharine's heart, mighty enough to have kindled the hearts of hundreds and thousands, not merely were an innumerable number of God's Houses suffering desecration and destruction, but there were also daily rumours on all sides, gradually drawing nearer and nearer, of fearful heresies and scepticisms, which threatened to extinguish the light of faith in the living Presence of God in the Holy Eucharist.

At this time the Jansenistic heresy was raging in its full power, and directed all its hate against the adorable Sacrifice and the sacred worship with which the latter has ever been surrounded since Its institution by our Lord Jesus Christ, seeking to drive It away by force from the Church. In the same manner the Jansenists were endeavouring to root out devotion to His Blessed Mother from the hearts of the faithful.

The whole series and consequences of these horrible monstrosities came before Anne Catharine's mind, filling her soul with unutterable woe, as often as she knelt before the altar, and it seemed to her as though she had to bear, corporally, in the stead of her Spouse, the pains which were being prepared for His Sacred Heart in

abuses against the Blessed Sacrament. Often in the dead of night did she glide from her cell to the closed chapel door, and lie there weeping at the threshold, consumed in grief and longings, until at break of day, and half frozen, she could gain admittance within ; for only in the vicinity of her Saviour could she find consolation and alleviation for the anguish she endured in atonement for the outrages that were committed against Him.

These sufferings corresponded in measure and diversity with the sins themselves. From the lukewarmness and indifference of ordinary Christians in their preparations and thanksgivings for the reception of Holy Communion, down to the direst sacrileges of the enemies of the Church, she had to atone for all, and would soon have succumbed under the weight of this fearful task had not God quickly erased the appalling impression of these horrors from her soul, and filled it instead with His own consolation. In proportion to the depth and vividness of the wondrous insight which these sufferings gave her into the majesty and glory of the Blessed Sacrament, and to the ardour with which her longings towards It were kindled, did her devotion, her holy awe, and her interior self-abasement increase. Thus it happened that often when she was to receive Holy Communion, a struggle arose within her, between her ardent loving desire and the holy fear of a creature oppressed by the sense of her own unworthiness and guilt—a struggle which could only be decided by obedience. The fear never left her that she herself, on account of her imperfections, might have been to blame for some of the many non-observances of the rule, and other marks of disrespect committed by her sister nuns ; and therefore, in the depth of her humility, she would not venture to receive Holy Communion as often as her director desired or as she herself absolutely needed.

Overberg's account of this timidity of hers is as fol-

lows : “ Her confessor wished Anne Catharine to communicate oftener than her sisters were in the habit of doing. She obeyed for a time, and then ceased, against the wishes of her confessor, from motives of human respect, namely, because the others deemed her frequent communions hypocrisy, and made unpleasant observations about them. Moreover, she thought herself too wicked to communicate so often. Soon, however, she became so utterly miserable, that she doubted if she should save herself, and could not restrain her lamentations and fears. Finally, she recognised her mistake in not having followed the advice of her confessor, and now began to communicate more frequently. She had still to bear the penalty of this disobedience for two years, inasmuch as during that period all consolations were denied her, and nothing but aridity left.

“ After these two years the consolations returned, and she experienced so burning a desire for the Sacred Particles that she could not wait for the ordinary hour of communicating. Therefore her confessor ordered her to make her communions before the other nuns were up, that she might excite the less notice. To do this she was obliged to go and knock at the Abbé Lambert’s door, who was always so kind as to give her Holy Communion at those early hours. She often came earlier even than the appointed time, not being able to withstand the violence of her desire for the Holy Eucharist. Once she arrived soon after midnight, for she felt as if she must die of longing. It seemed to her as though her whole inside was in a flame, and as if she were being so powerfully dragged towards the church that her limbs were almost torn from her body. The abbé was very much annoyed with her for knocking him up so early, but when he saw the state she was in he came out at once and gave her the Holy Communion.”

Overberg proceeds to give an account of her methods of prayer, which we will quote : “ The manner in which she heard Mass was worshipful devotion itself. As soon as the priest began the prayers, she united herself in spirit with Jesus on the Mount of Olives, and contemplated. She then prayed to God that He would send down His grace to enable all men to hear Mass devoutly, and all priests to offer the Most Holy Sacrifice in the manner most pleasing to Himself, and to Jesus that He would look upon all there present with the same eye of mercy with which He gazed on Peter.

“ At the *Gloria* she praised God with all the angels and saints in heaven and on earth, and gave thanks to our Saviour that He deigned to renew His sacrifice daily, and prayed to Him to illuminate all men with His light, and to send comfort and succour to the souls in Purgatory.

“ At the Gospel she asked God that she and all others might have the grace to follow faithfully in the teaching of the Gospel.

“ At the Offertory she offered the bread and wine to God, in union with the priest, and prayed that they might be changed into the flesh and blood of Christ, and also occupied herself in thinking how soon her Saviour would now come.

“ At the *Sanctus* she prayed that the whole world might join with her in praising God.

“ At the words of Consecration she presented our Saviour to His Heavenly Father, offering Him for the whole world, particularly for the conversion of sinners, for the consolation of those poor sinners who lay on their death-beds, and for her sisters in religion. She then represented the altar to herself as encircled by angels, who dared not look upon our Saviour, and thought upon her own boldness in gazing upon the Host, upon which her eyes were henceforth and to the end of Mass rivetted.

“She frequently saw the Blessed Sacrament surrounded by a great brilliancy, and sometimes beheld a cross of a brownish hue—never white—in the Host. Had it been white, like the Host itself, she could not have seen it. The cross did not look to her larger than the Host, but the Host itself appeared a greater size than usual.

“From the Elevation to the *Agnus Dei* she prayed for the souls in Purgatory, showing Christ upon the cross to God the Father, and praying that His merits might obtain that which she was not able to obtain herself.

“At the Communion she reflected on the burial of Jesus and prayed that He would bury the old man and create new hearts within us.”

If she heard the organ played, or singing during Mass, or indeed at any other time, she thought to herself, “Ah ! how beautiful it is when all is in harmony together ! Lifeless things agree with one another so sweetly, why cannot the hearts of men do the same ? How lovely that would be !” And then she could not keep from weeping.

At the midnight Mass on Christmas-eve she invariably beheld the Holy Child Jesus suspended above the chalice. Sometimes she saw the Babe in the Host, but very small.

Whilst she was sacristan she had a seat in the choir, whence she could not see the altar ; she had given up her rightful place to another of the nuns, who was always greatly distracted at Mass if she could not see the altar. As Anne Catharine stood here one morning with the bell-rope in her hand, ready to ring for the Elevation, she beheld the Child Jesus raised on high in the chalice. “Oh ! how beautiful He looked.” She thought herself in heaven already, and was about to spring over the railing to get to Him, when she recollected herself, and remained where she was, but entirely forgot to ring the bell. This ringing of the bell she often did forget, till

Mass was nearly over, and this forgetfulness occasioned her many a scolding.

It was a great happiness to her to communicate on Thursdays, in honour of the Blessed Sacrament. She always regarded that day with an especial veneration, and kept it as a little private feast in her own way, taking greater pains with her dress, to do her Lord all the honour she could.

Sometimes she beheld a cross in the Host, streaming with blood, and now and then the Divine Infant also appeared, of a bright rosy colour, like a ray of light in the Sacred Particles. At the moment of communicating she often beheld her Lord, in the form of the Divine Bridegroom, come towards her, and vanish as she received the Blessed Sacrament into her mouth, whilst she was sensibly conscious of His sweet presence.

Of her other modes of prayer Overberg relates as follows : "She used very few vocal prayers besides those appointed in the Rule ; her usual prayer was in the form of familiar converse with God, like a child talking to its father, when she told Him her wants, and made her requests in simple love and confidence." This speaking to God was unintermittent day and night, and even during meals, except when she was in contemplation ; and in the latter case she was often quite insensible to what was passing at table. If she herself was made the topic of conversation, she never perceived it, unless the voices grew very loud indeed. The Abbé Lambert once asked her after a meal how she could bear to listen to such idle stuff as had been talked the whole time, when she replied that she had not heard one syllable that had passed.

For a considerable length of time she used to dispute with God, asking Him why He did not convert all great sinners, instead of punishing the unconverted eternally in

another world. She then would say to God that she could not understand how He could do what was so contrary to His nature, for He was so good and merciful, and it cost Him nothing to convert sinners, since He held them all in His hand. She laid before Him all that He and His beloved Son had done for sinners; how our Lord had suffered agony on a cross, and died a cruel death. She prayed Him to remember His own Word in Holy Scripture, and what He there said of His own goodness and mercy, and what promises He made therein, venturing to ask Him how, if He did not keep His own Word, He could expect mankind to be faithful to theirs? The Abbé Lambert, to whom she related these arguments, replied, "Gently, gently, you go too far!" and henceforth she understood that it must be so; that if God converted all sinners, or put an end to eternal punishment, mankind would cease to fear God, to worship Him, and would even go so far as to forget Him.

She had ever a special confidence in the Blessed Virgin, and had recourse to her in particular when she had committed a fault, praying in this wise: "Oh! Mother of my Saviour, thou art doubly my Mother. Thy Son gave Thee to me for a Mother when He was made flesh, and again when He said to St. John, 'Behold thy Mother!' and now I am wedded to Thy Son. I have been disobedient to Thy Son, my spouse, and am ashamed to be seen of Him. Have thou pity on me! a mother's heart is ever kind. Pray for forgiveness for me! Thy request can never be refused!"

Once, not long before the suppression of the convent, when she had sought consolation amongst creatures in vain, she ran weeping across the courtyard of the convent into the chapel, and threw herself upon the steps before the Blessed Sacrament, imploring for mercy and grace.

She was brought nearly to despair, for it appeared to her as though she alone were guilty of the sad state of things in the community. In this anguish she prayed thus : "I am, O God, the prodigal son. I have wasted my heritage which Thou hadst given me. I am not worthy to be called Thy child. Have pity on me ! Receive me back again ! I beseech Thee, through the intercession of my sweetest Mother, who is Thy Mother also !" Then she heard this answer from God, "Be at rest ; My grace is sufficient for thee ; thou shalt no longer seek for thy consolations amongst men." Often when she was making some very fervent request to God, and promising Him great things, He asked her in reply, how she could promise such great things when little things were beyond her strength !

When she was praying on behalf of others she laid their distresses simply before God, mentally imploring Him to help them, with the utmost confidence that He would grant her request, and then perhaps added one "Our Father," or short vocal prayer in conclusion. She said once in speaking of her own prayer, "I can never use the prayers in the missal which have been translated into German. They strike me as so cold and dull, and I never can bind myself to any language in praying ; but ever since I can remember anything, the Latin was always the one which I understood best, and which spoke to my heart. I always looked forward beforehand to days when we used the Latin psalms and responses in the convent. Then the festival seemed to grow into life before me, and I saw everything which we were singing. This was especially the case with the Litany of Loreto ; as the words flowed on, I saw all the allegories they described in oh ! such beautiful pictures, which increased my devotion wonderfully ; though at first I was frightened, for it seemed as though I spoke the pictures."

The uninterrupted celebration of the holy Sacrifice of the Mass throughout the Church was always visibly present to Anne Catharine's mind. One day, whilst the bell was ringing for Mass, she was found praying in profound recollection in her room, with the look upon her face which always betokened that her spirit was far from the actual world around her, and on being asked afterwards what she saw at the time, she replied, "At that moment I was contemplating the scenes of Good Friday. I saw our Lord offering Himself as victim upon the cross. I saw His Mother and the beloved disciple standing at the foot of the cross, and yet it all seemed to be taking place upon the altar where the priest was celebrating Mass. I see this scene of Mount Calvary upon our altars at all hours of both day and night; I see the whole parish before me, and I know whether they are praying well or badly; I see, too, how the priest is discharging his sacred function.

"First of all, the church here comes before my eyes, and then gradually the churches and congregations of neighbouring places, just as the light of the sun penetrating through the thick glades of a forest reveals first one object, and then another and another, till all is made visible and distinct under his beams. I see the holy Mass offered up all over the world, at all hours of the day; I can even see countries where it is still celebrated in the same manner as at the time of the Apostles. Above the altar I perceive a heavenly liturgy, in which angels supply any omissions on the part of the priest. I offer my heart as a sacrifice at the same time, in reparation for the indevotion of those present, and I pray our Lord to have mercy on them. I behold many priests celebrating in a deplorable manner. Those who, stiff and starched, apply themselves especially to presenting a good outward appearance, are generally the worst, for

frequently this preoccupation causes them to neglect interior devotion. They are always saying to themselves: 'What effect shall I make upon the people?' and they forget to think about God.

"During the day I see this sacred ceremony as if at a distance. Jesus loves us so much that He continues His work of redemption continually in the holy sacrifice of the altar, and the holy Mass is historical redemption, covered with a veil, and thus transformed into a sacrament. Every operation of God is eternal, but in their relationships with our temporal life, which is successive, these operations are in the form of promise before entering into this succession, and when once they have passed into the accomplishment of time, they appear under the form of mystery, and thus they remain. I have seen this from my earliest youth, and at that time I fancied every one else saw as I did."

CHAPTER XIV.

Suppression of the Convent.

ON the 3rd December, 1811, the convent of Agnetenberg was suppressed, and the church closed.

Although Anne Catharine had long foreseen this unspeakably painful event, and had incessantly offered herself to bear any pains God would deign to accept for the aversion of so great a calamity; still she could not realize, when the blow came, that she must leave those

beloved precincts for ever. It seemed to her easier for the soul to part from the body than for her to tear herself away from a spot where she had given herself, by the holiest of vows, to the Divine Bridegroom, in order to serve Him amid sufferings, hidden from the eyes of the world.

"I grew so ill," she related later, "that the other nuns were sure that I was going to die, so they left me undisturbed, whilst they busied themselves with their own preparations, and soon forgot my existence altogether. Then Our Blessed Lady came to comfort me and said: 'Thou wilt not die. There will be a great deal of stir and talk made about thee yet, but be not alarmed! whatever may happen, thou wilt always receive help.' After this, in all my troubles, I heard the words, 'Be not alarmed! thy task is not yet over,' ever sounding in my ears."

Whilst the other sisters were leaving the convent one after another, Anne Catharine remained behind till the following spring, for she was so weak and ill that she was unable to leave her cell during those months.

This damp, dark, cold little stone chamber, separated from the rest of the convent by a granary and winding stone staircase, was, nevertheless, a sort of earthly paradise to Anne Catharine, for here the petty spite and unworthy persecutions of her sisters in religion had never entered; cold and miserable as the place was, it was still her own; here she had ever been left undisturbed to herself, her sufferings, and her visions; whilst her sole visitors were those dear companions of her childhood, innocent doves and sparrows, who cooed and chirped about her window sill, gladdening her heart with the sweet music of their songs, as had been their wont in olden days, amidst the woods and meadows round her cottage home. The mice, too, had grown so accustomed

to see the quiet little figure stretched upon the bed, that they would jump confidentially to her side to receive her gentle caresses.

And thus alone, amidst the humblest of God's creatures, she would have lain, forgotten by the whole world,—that ungrateful world which had received such countless benefits at her hand—had not good Abbé Lambert and an old maid-servant, formerly attached to the convent, taken pity upon her, and out of their own need procured her the bare necessities of life. The abbé, who was himself in feeble health, homeless, and without a soul upon earth to whom he could look for sympathy or help in his poverty-stricken old age, stood faithfully by Anne Catharine's side at this critical juncture of her life. When he found, after a while, that it was impossible for her to remain longer in the deserted convent, he arranged that she should occupy a room in the house of a widow at Dulmen, with whom he was himself lodging.

Hither he and the old servant-maid, half led, half carried the poor sick girl along the streets of the little town. When she found herself outside the shelter of the convent walls, in a public thoroughfare, "I was so overwhelmed with fear and shyness," she said afterwards, "that I felt as though every stone in the road would swallow me up!"

In exchange for the quiet of her cell, she found an uncomfortable little room on the ground floor of the cottage, in which every footfall from the street outside could be heard, and where the sole protection she had from the public gaze was an ill-fitting strip of blind, which barely stretched across a window which was almost on a level with the ground. She had hardly passed a day in this wretched little room (which was her home for rather more than a year) before she was taken dangerously ill, and appeared to be wasting away like a plant which

withers and fades when it has been suddenly transplanted from a mountain dell to a dusty road-side in the valley beneath.

She soon became too weak to walk, even with assistance, or to leave her bed, and the sole nourishment she could take was a little wine and water, or occasionally the juice squeezed from a cherry or a plum; anything else she immediately vomited; but after receiving the last Sacraments her condition improved slightly, and in the autumn of 1813 she was able to be removed into another lodging, which opened out upon a garden. Her ecstasies and spiritual intercourse with the invisible world became, if possible, more manifold and wonderful than before. About this time it pleased our Lord to answer her constant prayer that He would imprint His sacred cross deeply upon her heart, by marking her virginal body with the stigmata of His crucifixion.

One day, whilst praying fervently that He would never permit the memory of His infinite love for mankind to be effaced from her heart, she beheld a beautiful youth coming towards her, who presented her with a little cross, which she eagerly seized and pressed to her bosom. A short time after this an aching pain began to make itself felt in the spot where the cross had touched her breast, which increased in burning intensity until the outline of a red cross appeared, as though traced in blood, under the skin. This cross measured about three inches in length, and seemed as if it were burnt into the bone. Blood exuded from it at certain intervals, especially on all Good Fridays, whilst on every Friday throughout the year the colour became of a deeper red.

Her stigmatization took place at the close of the year 1812. On the 29th December, about three o'clock in the afternoon, she was extended upon the bed in her little

room in an ecstasy, with her arms outstretched in the form of a cross, contemplating the sufferings of her Lord in His Passion. Suddenly her fervour redoubled, and she murmured five "Our Fathers" in honour of the Five Wounds, and her countenance grew very red, and as though inflamed with love.

She then beheld a light descending towards her, and distinguished the form of the crucified Saviour, with His wounds all shining like luminous suns. Her heart was transported with joy at the sight of these holy Wounds, and her thirst to suffer with her Lord grew almost unbearable in its intensity. As she looked and longed, three rays of a bright red light seemed to come from the hands, feet, and side of the apparition, which terminated in the form of arrows, and pierced her hands, feet, and right side. At the moment she was touched drops of blood issued from the places of the wounds, and she sank down unconscious.

When she recovered her senses she felt that after receiving the stigmata a change had been operated in her body; the course of her blood seemed to have totally altered its direction, and now flowed with all its force to the places of the five wounds.

We are indebted to a singular incident for the knowledge of the above occurrence. A few days later Anne Catharine had a circumstantial vision touching all the operations which had of late been effected in herself, which appeared to her as the history of another nun suffering much in a similar way as herself; and she related these details in a tone of heartfelt compassion which was touching in the extreme.

"I must never complain again," she said, "since I have seen the sufferings of that poor little nun there; look, her heart is enclosed in a crown of thorns, and she bears the

anguish so quietly and with a smile on her face ! It is a shame of me to pity myself when she has a far heavier burthen than I have to bear !”

From this period graces and celestial favours were heaped upon Anne Catharine in richer and yet richer profusion, whilst her bodily sufferings reached such a height that every succeeding month brought with it a fresh tide of anguish, until the mere spectacle of her poor body preached Jesus Christ Crucified by a daily incessant torture, borne with a calm, smiling patience which should have melted the hearts of all beholders.

This, however, was far from being the case. Anne Catharine's condition soon became known. Strive as she might to hide herself from the eyes of all, she was now deprived of the shelter and seclusion of convent life, and in a state of utter helplessness. Her strange condition became very soon the subject of gossip and common talk, which rapidly grew into puzzled conjecture and angry suspicion. Thus, in addition to her other woes, she lost the right to her privacy and became an object which every curious stranger considered himself at liberty to inspect and examine at his leisure. Upon this coming to the knowledge of the ecclesiastical authorities in Dulmen, a medical examination of her state was appointed to be held.

This was the beginning of a long martyrdom, which inflicted tortures on every fibre of her nervous system, wounding her sensitive delicacy to the quick, and was of incalculable detriment to her soul, as well as to her body, inasmuch as for long sorrow-laden years together, it completely deprived her of that repose and quiet recollection which were to her as the very breath of life itself. Her patient confidence in God remained unshaken throughout this as throughout all the former stormy periods of her past existence, and when the clouds around her seemed

at their darkest, and she felt as though she must sink under her load of woe, she clung firmly to the promise made her by One Who never fails to help those who confide in Him : " Whatever may be in store for thee, I will be with thee to the end."

The first examination took place on March 22nd, 1813, when a document was drawn up, establishing the miraculous existence of the stigmata, together with Anne Catharine's perfect innocence and guilelessness. This over, Anne Catharine turned to the Dean Rensing, who had been the institutor of this investigation, saying : " This is not all. I see many gentlemen coming from Munster to examine me ; one tall man in particular, who looks like an archbishop : " which words came only too true, for on March 28th the former vicar-general of Munster, afterwards a celebrated archbishop of Cologne, accompanied by Dean Overberg and by several physicians, came in order to put Anne Catharine through a searching examination.

This examination had for its result a succession of experiments, such as washing the stigmata with different chemicals, binding the wounds tightly for hours together, and the like. All these caused the poor sufferer almost intolerable agony, so much so that she declared her fear to Overberg lest she should lose the command of her senses, and forget the duty of obedience she owed to the ecclesiastical commission, Indeed, nothing served to calm her fears and pacify her, until he promised to offer up the holy sacrifice of the Mass for her intention on the following morning, that God might give her the necessary strength. From this time the pains in the wounds increased in intensity, and were accompanied by frequent fainting fits, until on the 2nd of April her voice became hardly audible, as she turned imploringly to the Dean,

saying : " I see more and more men who want to look at my marks : I am so frightened ; can you not hinder them from coming ? "

Her prophetic words were fulfilled in two days' time, when a French police commissary arrived from Munster, in order to question Anne Catharine and her attendants and to make an official investigation of the case. He began by putting several questions to Anne Catharine, as to whether she interfered with political matters, or prophesied concerning them, and then desired the wound of the right hand to be shown him. So deep was the impression which the suffering nun made upon this functionary, that fourteen years later he could not mention her name without emotion. The doctor now seeing that the linen bandages irritated and inflamed the wounds, ordered them to be covered with plasters. This measure however, far from giving relief, increased the fever and the pain a thousandfold, but the plasters had no power to stop the blood from flowing.

From this time forth visits of all kinds, ecclesiastical, medical, and official, friendly and hostile, were forced upon the poor girl ; every medical man for miles round considered her suffering body public property for surmise and experiment. In vain she implored those around her to protect her from the agony of exposure to public gaze, which, to a religious person, was far worse than even the acute bodily suffering which it caused her ; in vain she protested ; in vain she answered question after question, and submitted to treatment after treatment. Her woes were not to end here ; heavier trials were in store. God required yet greater, yet more perfect obedience from His servant. He chose that she should at this period, by a combination of circumstances, be, so to speak, forsaken by her spiritual advisers, overwhelmed in desolation of spirit, pursued in her troubled sleep by hateful objects,

and in her waking moments by temptations of the evil one. She prayed, and it seemed as though her prayers were not heard, till in her anguish she would press to her aching brow a relic of the true Cross, which Overberg had left with her when he went away, and this gave her strength to pursue her weary way of the cross.

After Holy Communion a ray of light would sometimes break across her soul, in the shape of one of those consoling visions which now so seldom cheered her path. On one occasion two angels came towards her, bearing a beautiful garland of flowers between them; the flowers were white roses, and when she tried to gather them, a long pointed hidden thorn wounded her finger, and she heard the words: "If thou wilt have the roses, thou must also endure the thorns." Another time she appeared to be carried into a lovely garden, where she beheld roses of an enormous size blooming, of every hue. They were surrounded by such long and spiked thorns that she could not gather one, and in complaining of this, her angel made answer, "He who will not suffer, can merit no joy."

Joy without suffering was sometimes set before her, but always as purchased by death: "I saw myself," she relates, "lying in my grave, but oh! how happy I felt; at the same time something seemed to say to me, 'thou hast much more yet to suffer before thou comest here.' Then Mary with the Child came towards me, and she placed the Babe in my arms, and oh! how joyful I felt! When I gave Him back to her, I implored Mary to give me three things that might make me pleasing in her sight, and in her Son's eyes, namely, love, humility, and patience. Oh! how I longed to go then to heaven with my Saviour, but my time is not yet come, my sorrows and sufferings must increase yet a hundredfold; I must be yet more tried, yet more purified. God's will be done!

May He but give me the grace to resign myself patiently and submissively to His will until the end !”

Once when she had just received Holy Communion she heard these words : “ Will’st thou rather die now or suffer still more ? ” and she replied : “ I will choose to suffer Lord, if it be pleasing to Thee ! ” How manifold her sufferings were we have seen, and how they were increased by those around her, who should at least have striven to mitigate her burden, will appear from the following report made at this time by Dr. Wesener. “ I found Anne Catharine this evening very restless and almost crazed with pain. Her sister had washed her wounds, and the sores with which lying in bed had covered her back ; the agony this occasioned had almost caused her to lose her senses. Writhing on her bed, she was saying in tones of anguish to her sister : ‘ Why did you do this ? I am ready to suffer all things, but could not you have been more gentle with me ? ’ ”

This sister, as will be seen later, was a constant source of pain and annoyance to Anne Catharine, who, from the goodness of her heart, concealed the rough usage she received at her hands, rather than make others aware of what she endured. In Munster brandy is considered by the lower classes an infallible panacea, and throughout all her sufferings this sister insisted on rubbing Anne Catharine’s quivering flesh therewith, until she lost consciousness time after time ; treating her as almost all at this time treated the poor sufferer, like a senseless thing, not as a living, feeling human creature ; and how niggard was the attendance which she received from those who were supposed to tend her, may be gathered from the fact that upon hot summer days, when she lay unconscious in her ecstasies, swarms of flies were allowed to settle upon her wounds, stinging the tender flesh, until blood flowed copiously from them.

On the 8th April, 1813, Overberg received orders to re-examine Anne Catharine upon the subject of her stigmas, and to draw up a report according to the daily observations of Dechant Rensing and Drs. Krauthausen and Wesener, who had watched her condition from the time of the first examination.

The following is an abridgment of Overberg's examination, and the depository information he received from Rensing and Wesener.

Overberg.—“ Have you ever (as might happen without ill intent) scratched your hands with a nail or any other sharp instrument in order to sympathize with Jesus Christ in His sufferings?”

Anne Catharine.—“ No, never.”

O.—“ Have you ever poured *aquafortis* or *lapis infernalis* upon these spots?”

A. C.—“ I do not know what those things are. I never knew of the existence of the wounds until some one else (Abbé Lambert) remarked upon them to me, saying, ‘ Don’t imagine that you are a St. Catharine of Siena, or anything of that sort.’ ”

Upon Overberg's observing that it seemed extraordinary that when a person had received a wound she should be unaware of its existence; “ so it does,” she replied, “ but then the pain had been there for nearly four years before the wounds came, and I felt no difference. When I received the exterior marks a little girl only was waiting upon me, who did not think to wash away the drops of blood. And so it happened that the abbé noticed the wounds in my hands before I did. I had, however, felt the pain round my head for four years before I went into the convent. It feels as though my head was bound round with thorns, indeed as though all my hairs were thorns, until I cannot lay my head down upon the pillow without great pain. The pain of the other wounds is not

like ordinary pain, it seems to go straight to my heart. The slightest pressure or touch upon the cross upon my breast gives me greater interior than exterior pain. It seems then as though the whole bosom were on fire. In the wound, however, in my side, I felt as though suddenly penetrated by a fierce fire."

O.—"When did the wounds on the body appear?"

A. C.—"The wound on the side came on the Feast of St. Augustin, the lower cross on the breast about six weeks later, the upper cross on the breast on the Feast of St. Catharine of Siena, and the wounds on the hands and feet last Christmas."

O.—"Had you any special visions or illuminations at the time of the wounds appearing?"

A. C.—"No, I was in very great suffering then."

O.—"Do you not know what the cross on the breast signifies?"

A. C.—"No; but I often imagine that the first one was to warn me that I had much to suffer for Christ's sake, and that the second meant renewed sorrows in store for me."

O.—"Can you not remember when you received the wounds in the hands and feet?"

A. C.—"Four years before the suppression of the convent I went to Coesfeld to see my parents, and whilst there I went into the church to pray for a few moments before the great cross behind the altar. I was in great grief at the state of things in our convent, and prayed that I and my sisters might see our faults, so that all might be at peace. I also prayed that Jesus would let me share in all His sufferings. From this time the burning pains began. I thought I might have got a perpetual fever, and at the same time the thought would strike me that this might be the answer to my prayer, though I always rejected the idea, because I thought myself un-

worthy of such a favour. My feet often hurt me so that I could not walk. My hands, too, became so painful that I could not do many of my customary works, such as digging; the middle finger was stiff too, and seemed as if it were dead.

After I had had these pains for some time I prayed earnestly that all in the convent might be in charity together, and that my sufferings might cease. Then I heard these words in answer: "Thy sufferings will never cease. May the grace of God suffice thee. None of thy sisters in religion will die until they have seen their errors."

When questioned by Overberg about the cross, she replied: "From my childhood I have often prayed to God that He would engrave His Cross upon my heart, that I might never forget His sufferings; but I never thought of any outward sign."

From the time that Anne Catharine had perceived her wounds she had ever carefully strived to hide them from the eyes of all beholders, and therefore generally covered them over with the bed-clothes, or, when the burning pain became intolerable, with a white cloth. "One day," related Dr. Wesener, in the report he gave to Overberg, "I brought my sister to see Anne Catharine. She was lying in a state of unconsciousness, or ecstasy. Fr. Limberg (her confessor) wished to remove the cloth which covered her hands, and she moved restlessly, when he asked: 'What is the matter?' Without opening her eyes, she whispered, 'Some one is asking of me what I must not do.'" I desired, however, that my sister's faith should be aroused by the wonderful apparitions; and so Fr. Limberg gave his blessing to Anne Catharine, when she slowly, without awaking from her ecstasy, began to make the sign of the Cross with her trembling hand, but with great evident anxiety lest the cloth should be displaced."

Overberg's report concludes with Anne Catharine's

method of prayer when receiving Holy Communion at this period : " Her final preparation consists," he says, " in turning to her Saviour and praying Him to give her His own heart, in order that she may give Him a worthy reception ; telling Him that only with His own heart can she love Him and praise Him as He deserves. Then she makes Him an offering of her heart, begging Him to take care of it and do with it what He wills. She offers Him her soul and her body, her eyes, her ears, all her members, praying Him to make use of them in His own service, and to do with them all that her weakness cannot accomplish of itself.

" She then makes a compact with God that He will take every breath, every movement, every suffering as an act of praise of His Majesty and of thanksgiving for His goodness. After this she turns to the Saints, and implores them all to give or lend her some of their beauty and virtues wherewith to clothe herself the more fittingly for the reception of the most Holy Sacrament. Before all others, she has recourse to the Mother of God, praying her out of her abundance to bestow on her some special ornament of grace, and to present the Divine Infant to her adoration, as she presented Him to the three kings out of the far East, saying, ' Thou art overflowing with riches and I am so poor ! Therefore have pity on me ! I only ask a little drop out of the sea of thine abundance ! ' After receiving Holy Communion she falls into a prolonged ecstasy."

After Overberg's enquiry the authorities appointed a watch to be held over Anne Catharine for ten days by twenty townsmen of Dulmen. Their orders were never to leave her day or night for a single instant ; even during confession her watchers were never to leave the room ; they were to confine themselves to looking on. Further than this their office was not to extend.

This proceeding closed the Church's inquisition, and resulted in naught save a yet more full and complete manifestation of Anne Catharine's truth, purity, and innocence, and of the marvellous paths by which it was God's good pleasure to conduct this chosen soul.

CHAPTER XV.

Great Trials.

A FEW days after the close of the examination Anne Catharine received several visits from persons distinguished by their piety as well as by their rank, who came to testify their sympathy and veneration for the holy suffering woman. Amongst these was the far-famed Count Frederick Leopold Stolberg, the account of whose visit we will give in his own words.

"Overberg took us to see Anne Catharine about nine o'clock in the morning. Her little room has only one door, which opens upon the street, so that it is perpetually exposed to the public gaze. It is scrupulously clean and neat. Anne Catharine received us with great cordiality, although the fact of showing herself gives her evident pain. Overberg bade her take her hands from under the cloth with which she keeps them covered, that we might see them. It was on a Friday. The wounds had bled profusely. She now took off the bandage from her head, and we saw the whole of the head surrounded with wounds as though pierced with thick sharp thorns, which

wounds were filled with oozing blood. It would have been impossible for any painter to have imitated the thorny crown so faithfully as it was impressed on her brow.

“ Anne Catharine, who was formerly a poor peasant girl, who minded the village cows and worked for her bread, now expresses herself upon religious subjects with a dignity and refinement of language which she could never have learnt in the convent, whilst the beauty and spiritual wisdom of her mind speak in every word she utters. Her looks beam friendliness to all, her manner is bright, and her voice low, soft, and clear. There is nothing exaggerated in her expressions, because love knows no exaggeration ; and overpowering love of God and long-suffering charity towards her neighbour, are the atmosphere in which she lives, moves, and breathes. ‘ How happy we are,’ she said, ‘ to know Jesus Christ ! How easy He makes it for us all to love Him !’ Whilst far from esteeming herself as a specially favoured person in consequence of the outward signs she bears of God’s favours, she deems herself utterly unworthy of His love, and bears these marks of divine grace in humble anxiety and fearfulness.”

This letter was written by Count Stolberg to Michael Sailer, afterwards Bishop of Ratisbon, who published it far and wide, as being the testimony of so universally-respected an authority. Thus it fell into the hands of the poet Brentano, and was the primary origin of his desire to see one with whom his life was to be subsequently so strangely united, and who is well known in all her subsequent revelations under the name of “ The Pilgrim.”

It is time now to turn to Anne Catharine’s own interior and exterior condition at this most trying period of her life, when she had become, as it were, an occasion of stumbling to all, on account of the marks of the Crucified

Spouse which she bore about on her body ; when moreover she had grown to be a burden to her friends, the weight of which burden returned with double force upon her own devoted head ; when her own confessor looked upon her state as a misfortune ; when she was misunderstood and often maltreated by her own relations ; when the spiritual pastor of the town in which she dwelt drew back from her, so soon as he found his own calling likely to be endangered by her vicinity ; and when the highest ecclesiastical authorities of the diocese had forced her to undergo severe examinations on the charge of duplicity and falsehood, sparing her no torment in order to give up her almost intolerable wounds to the gaze of the world at large ; and, when this over, she was abandoned, helpless, and defenceless to the curiosity, importunity, and suspicion of every chance passer-by, and, a few months' later, to the most terrible persecutions which ever befel an innocent human being.

Surely it was a gigantic task indeed, amidst such woes, to preserve invariable meekness and patience, and to turn a cheerful unruffled countenance to all comers. And yet well indeed did Anne Catharine accomplish this task. No word of complaint was ever heard upon her lips when she was suspected of duplicity and publicly accused of imposture, and so deeply engraven upon her soul was the conviction of her own unworthiness, and so great her dread of worldly honour or esteem, that she absolutely preferred to be looked upon as an object of popular distrust, and shrank from a syllable of praise as though torture were being inflicted upon her whole frame.

Her confessor at this time was Fr. Limberg, a Dominican, who had suffered like herself from the violent suppression of all monasteries and convents throughout Westphalia, and had returned to the world with the firm determination to continue to live as strictly in accordance

with his vows as should be possible. It therefore appeared to Anne Catharine as a specially gracious ordinance of Providence that she should have received so strict and conscientious a religious for her spiritual adviser, and from the first hour of their intercourse, her utmost endeavour was ever to render to him an unhesitating, perfect obedience.

Not only did she regard him as her director, but also as the representative of her former superiors in religion, and therefore she gave to his every word and command the same unbounded deference and submission which she had formerly rendered to those placed in authority over her in the convent, and endeavoured to regulate her life accordingly. Although her strange inner life was a mystery to him, and was incessantly misunderstood by the simple-minded, inexperienced, almost unlettered religious ; although in sense, wisdom, and enlightenment of mind she was immeasurably his superior, her behaviour towards him was never otherwise than that of a docile, blindly-obedient child, because she looked upon each word which fell from his lips as a distinct command from God, allowing of no opposition.

Frequently, her own experience or the prophetic warnings of her angel showed her that obedience to this or that injunction on the part of her confessor would be followed by unutterable anguish to herself ; yet never did this foreknowledge, nor his invariable and often ill-judged harshness and severity, turn her by so much as a hair's-breadth from her obedience, for the maintenance of which she spared neither pain nor sacrifice.

Just as a plant cannot grow and a flower cannot bloom without air and light, so was it with Anne Catharine's soul and priestly guidance. The words and the blessing of God's anointed were more to her than the benediction of even her angel. Obedience was the channel through

which all the fruits of her marvellous labours flowed into the body of the Church—through which she was enabled to suffer in her own person in the stead of that body—through which, in fine, she herself was so firmly bound and united to the Church.

This obedience, however, rested upon the faith by the light of which the priest and confessor held towards her the position of God's representative, and Anne Catharine firmly believed that her gift of prophecy was bestowed upon her in such overwhelming fulness only that she might lead a life perfected by faith, and show forth thereby to all time that those whom God favours by the bestowal of extraordinary manifestations and unusual gifts can know no other law, and follow no loftier ordinance, than the rule of faith of the infallible Church, which is the pillar and foundation of truth. The true mystic moves and breathes in no other region but that of discipline, of the service of God, of the Sacraments, of the rites and customs of the Church, and of the principles laid down by the saints and ancient fathers.

When Fr. Limberg undertook the direction of Anne Catharine's soul, he adopted the principle of carefully striving to conceal all that appeared remarkable in his penitent, and of declaring her visions to be the result of idle fancy, in order to foster her humility. He was himself of so timorous a disposition that it cost him many years before he was capable of rendering free, unwavering homage to the magnificent gifts of his spiritual child. Even after he had guided her soul for seven long years, and received innumerable proofs of her obedience, truthfulness, and sincerity, he was still unsatisfied, and still busied himself in devising modes in which he might put her genuineness to the test, as the following circumstance, related by his own lips, will show :

“ I was saying my office whilst the invalid lay in an

ecstatic prayer with closed eyes. She lay thus for a full hour before I laid down my Breviary. Fresh doubts forced themselves upon my mind, and I resolved to put them to the proof. I recollected that the Abbé Lambert had consecrated two Hosts at his Mass that morning, in order to have one ready wherewith to communicate the invalid on the following day. I therefore went in quest of the consecrated particles, laid them in a corporal which I enveloped in a stole, to carry to her bedside. As I entered the door of her room, she was still lying as before, but no sooner had my foot crossed the threshold than she lifted herself up with the greatest haste and anxiety, stretched out her arms, and sank upon her knees on the bed, exclaiming : ‘ Ah ! there is my Lord Jesus coming from the Tabernacle to visit me ! ’ I let her remain thus for a while in adoration, when I restored the Blessed Sacrament to the Church.”

Anne Catharine’s spirit of obedience did not stop with the circumstances of the spiritual life. Her desire of living under obedience led her to desire to be in subjection to every creature with whom she came in contact for God’s sake. Not a day passed in which she did not, with admirable cleverness and perseverance, seek how best she could thwart and sacrifice her own will. In consequence of her total absence of all self-assertion, and by her meek and humble resignation to her sufferings, those around her had come to consider her as an invalid who did not require much care or attention.

She was silent about her sufferings ; she was as anxious to help all who came near her for aid as ever ; she had so often been ill before and got better again, that little notice was taken of her ailments, or of her wants. As, however, she was now unable to do her room for herself, she had taken her younger sister Gertrude to live with and assist her. She, however, was so careless and in-

experienced that the sick woman was constantly obliged to give her lessons in cooking, washing, and such like ordinary woman's work from her bed of pain, and to prepare the abbé's dinner with her own hands.

Again, so completely did she keep silence as to the pain this caused her, that her sister grew to regard her as a whimsical person, who staid in bed from idleness or caprice, and who could eat and live like other people if she only chose; and we can imagine what Anne Catharine had to endure, while this view was held with regard to her state. Gertrude was of a weak, bitter disposition, and had neither respect nor affection for her suffering sister, grudging her the slight services she did render her, and sometimes leaving her for hours together, without so much as a glass of water within her reach.

She was, moreover, extremely touchy and obstinate, and would not bear a word of reasoning or expostulation. Day and night had Anne Catharine to suffer from the petulance, inconsiderateness, and rough usage of this wretched woman. And to this was added, owing to her gift of reading hearts, the inexpressible sorrow of knowing every one of the evil dispositions and unworthy passions which filled her sister's soul. Day and night she prayed for her and suffered for her, but not until after her own death did it please God to answer her supplications, when Gertrude recognized her faults, and repented bitterly of the cruelty with which she had treated poor Anne Catharine.

In speaking of the people who were with Anne Catharine at this time of her life, we must not omit Dr. Wesener, of whom mention has been made several times in these pages, and who, in more respects than one, occupied a prominent position in the life of this servant of God. Led from motives of curiosity to her bedside, when the news of the stigmata was first bruited abroad,

his acquaintance with her had rapidly induced the deepest interest on his part. This interest ripened into an affection and veneration which he retained to the end of his life, and had for its immediate result the restoration of his long-lost faith, and his complete reconciliation to Almighty God.

His profound gratitude for these graces, which he rightly attributed to the mediation of Anne Catharine, suggested to him the idea of noting down all his observations and experiences of her marvellous state, with the view of inscribing indelibly upon his memory the many features and points which appeared to his eyes to be so many proofs of the extraordinary state of perfection to which she had brought her marvellous life, taking special pains in the description of those circumstances and conversations which had materially aided, or had been of singular meaning, with respect to his own progress in the interior life.

These simple unadorned reports demonstrate as clearly as did five years later Clements Brentano's eloquent and poetical language, the ways and means used by the highly favoured girl for winning souls to God and to His holy law. It would be difficult to meet with two persons whose whole tenor of life, bent of mind, and natural disposition were more widely apart than the matter of fact Dulmen physician and the highly gifted poet Brentano; and yet we find both these men cordially agreeing in the avowal that the exterior and apparently accidental circumstances which had led to their relationship with Anne Catharine, had, by no endeavours nor intentions of their own, been to them a blessed and merciful dispensation of Providence, productive of the richest blessings and most fruitful consequences.

We will give in Wesener's own words the account of the impression which Anne Catharine made upon him,

not only at the moment of their acquaintance, but after an intimacy of many years. It will conduce to shed a yet fuller and more brilliant light upon her whole personality, and upon the extraordinary influence she exercised upon the souls of others.

"I heard of Anne Catharine Emmerich," writes Wesener, "for the first time in the year 1806, when I was practising in Rellinghausen, when I was requested by Krauthausen, the doctor to the Agnetenberg convent, to pronounce an opinion upon the inexplicable illness of a nun. At that time I had been reading about magnetism, and suggested that the attacks of which Krauthausen spoke might be cataleptic fits; in treating them as such, however, he found all remedies equally powerless, and only put the patient to unutterable torture.

"I heard no more of her until March, 1813, when her stigmata were made the subject of conversation at a party, when I made them the pretext of a medical visit to the sick woman.

"I found her unconscious in bed, but when she came to herself, she looked me frankly and cordially in the face, and on the Abbé Lambert's telling her who I was, answered with a smile that she knew all about me. This appeared to me as very strange, and as I thought I detected a feigned simplicity in her conduct, I determined to put an end to it by a stern, forbidding manner. My expectations of unmasking deceit remained unfulfilled, and thenceforth the oftener I saw the invalid the better I learnt to know her, the more thoroughly she disclosed herself to me as the placid, unsophisticated, matter of fact person which she had shown herself to be the first time I saw her, and as which she was universally considered.

"More and more clearly I discerned in her that guileless truly Christian character which is at peace with itself and

with the whole world, because it follows the most holy will of God in all things and all places. She deemed herself the worst and most unworthy of mankind, and loved all men better than herself. I shall never forget how simply and kindly she talked to me, as we got better acquainted, about my gloomy thoughts and crushing anxieties with respect to the threatened war, until I forgot their existence.

"She often distinctly told me that Napoleon's power would soon be at an end, and that Dulmen would be spared by the French army, and this came to pass exactly as she said it would, the French garrison of Minden laying waste the whole country round, with the single exception of Dulmen.

"She was equally cordial and affectionate towards all, especially towards the poor, whom she assisted in secret to bear their heavy burdens of want or sickness in many an unknown way. She possessed a singular gift of comforting, as I myself often experienced, for she awakened within me confidence in God and the long unused habit of prayer, and thus enabled me to shake off many a load of carking care which had hitherto weighed me to the ground. Her soul, entirely detached from creatures, lived entirely in God, and never was separated from Him, in spite of the distractions she experienced from all sides, from men and women of all ranks and classes pouring their burden of woe into her ear, seeking comfort and counsel, which they never sought in vain.

"With a smiling countenance and sweet words she would bid me be patient and of good courage. 'God is infinitely merciful,' she would say, 'and whoever is humble and penitent before Him finds pardon and grace.' She always earnestly besought me to help the poor, as that was a peculiarly pleasing work to offer to God.

"Whenever an opportunity presented itself she elo-

quently discoursed upon the incomparable happiness of belonging to the Catholic Church. 'Let us trust in God,' she loved to say, 'and hold fast to our faith. What can there be of greater comfort upon earth? What religion, what philosophy can replace it? I pity the Jews above all others, for their religion is nothing more than a legend of their rabbis, and the curse of the Lord rests upon them. But oh! how good the Lord is when we hold fast to the right way! How he comes to meet us halfway if we have but a goodwill! and how far do His outpourings of grace surpass our poor endeavours and requests!'

"Once when the conversation turned upon prayer, I said that I was quite aware that true prayer consisted in faithful fulfilment of one's duty, and in the exercise of mutual charity, but that I could not understand how she could remain for hours together in prayer, forgetting all around her, entirely lost in God, when she replied: 'Just think for a moment whether it is not possible that you should be so deeply interested in the reading of some beautiful book as to forget all that is going on around you? Well then, is it astonishing that when one is talking with God Himself, who is the source of all beauty, one should entirely forget oneself? Begin, once for all, with humble adoration of Him, and you will find the same happen with yourself.'

"I again answered her, suggesting the hindrances which men have to endure from the enemy of souls, upon which she said, 'it is true, the devil seeks to drive men away from prayer, and the more in earnest they are, the harder are his attacks. I was once shown an occasion of the sort. I found myself in a beautiful church, and saw three women praying, and behind them a horrible object. This figure whispered flatteries into the ear of the first of these women, who gradually fell asleep. It

then went on to the second, and sought to put her to sleep, but did not entirely succeed. The third woman, however, was so beaten and bruised by the figure that I felt great pity for her, and asked my guide what this meant, when he made reply, "This is an allegory of prayer. The first woman was devoid of zeal and earnestness, and therefore the devil soon put her to sleep. The second was better, but was lukewarm; the third was good, and her prayer fervent, therefore her temptation was more violent, and nevertheless was successfully overcome."

" 'The prayers that are peculiarly acceptable to God are those for others, and especially for the holy souls. Pray for them, and you will be putting your money out at good interest. As for myself I offer my whole self to God, and pray, "Lord do with me as Thou willest." Then I go on safely, for I know my good loving Father can only show good things and mercifulness to me.' She then went on to describe in burning words the woes of those in Purgatory, their pain of loss, and the forgetfulness of their sufferings, too common amongst men. I asked her also, why men were ever created, when she made answer, 'God made men for His own glory and for our happiness. When the angels fell He determined to create men, in order to fill up the empty ranks of those legions; and when the number of these is complete, the end of the world will come.' With amazement I enquired whence she knew this, and she answered, 'she knew it, but how she could not describe.'

"She would also talk to me for many hours together upon the Sacraments, upon good works, upon almsgiving, upon the virtues, upon the wisdom and philosophies of the age, and upon the blind haste with which men pursue the false goods of this world, on which latter subject she related to me the following vision: 'I stood

in a great wild field, which was covered with a countless crowd of men, working at all manner of things, and expending their energies to the utmost in pursuit of their separate ends. In their midst stood our Lord, with a countenance of inexpressible goodness, Who said to me : See how these people strive and distress themselves, how they seek comfort and help in gain, how they go to and fro and never so much as perceive Me, who stand here visible to all, Who am their Lord and Benefactor. Few, indeed, there are who give Me so much in a grateful look, and that they throw towards Me in hurrying by, as if they had not time so much as to turn their heads towards Me.'” In this sketch of his intercourse with Anne Catharine, Wesener concludes with a long account of her revelations to him of passages in the life of the Blessed Virgin and in Our Lord's childhood, which, as they have been separately published and laid before the reader elsewhere, we will omit in these pages.

As Wesener became daily more and more drawn into intimate relationship with Anne Catharine, it became clearly evident that, according to God's designs, he was intended to be an instrument in the perfection of her earthly task. She soon began to make use of him as a medium by which she could shower incessant gifts and consolation upon all the needy and infirm who were unable to drag themselves to her bedside. He had always a multitude of poor under his treatment, upon whom he bestowed not only his own professional skill, but also alms and clothing which Anne Catharine handed over to him for this purpose.

Every moment which she could seize by day or by night and devote to her needle, was spent in the service of the poor and the sick, and whenever her own scanty means failed to procure the requisite amount of linen and woollen materials, she begged remnants and cast-off

clothes from every compassionate heart amongst her visitors, and these apparently useless pieces of silk, brocade, or other stuffs, were marvellously and quickly shaped by the sick woman's clever fingers into snug hoods and cloaks for newly-born babies, who otherwise would hardly have had a rag to cover them. Often when in want of materials, she would turn with touching confidence towards St. Lidwina, Blessed Magdalen of Hadamar, or other saintly maidens stigmatized like herself, and speaking to them as though they were living persons, say, "Art thou there, Madlenchen? Look, Christmas is near at hand, and there are still so many children who want stockings and caps. Thou must keep thy promise and bring me some wool and some silk." Wesener was in the habit of relating to her all the wants and sorrows of his patients, and declares from daily experience that there was never a single invalid who did not receive her sympathy and spiritual assistance, and he was often amazed to find, that when he had in vain exhausted all his medical science upon a case, a sudden and unexpected change for the better would ensue, owing, not to his medicines, but to Anne Catharine's having taken the patient's malady upon herself, in order to bring relief or a tranquil death to the sufferer.

Wesener's vicinity to Anne Catharine was likewise productive of the happiest effects with regard to her confessor's relations with herself, since without the support of the experienced, intrepid medical man, poor, timorous, weakminded Fr. Limberg, in spite of all that had happened, would have again deserted his penitent at the first breath of idle calumny. Now, however, whenever he felt tempted to withdraw from the scene of endless doubt and torment, and to give up the direction of Anne Catharine's soul, he turned to Wesener, and the sight of the manful,

earnest way in which the latter fulfilled the duties of a Christian since Anne Catharine's influence had led him to return once more to the feet of his Lord, inspired him with courage and confidence to pursue the path which God had marked out for him unflinchingly to the end.

At this period it was deemed advisable to put Anne Catharine under the influence of a fresh course of medical treatment, and the tortures she endured from the well-meaning efforts of her friends to mitigate her sufferings, were hardly exceeded by those sufferings themselves. Her Angel warned her repeatedly not to refuse to take any of the medicines prescribed for her, and showed her that the pains she endured from this cause were sent her that she might expiate the crimes committed against the Church by the false doctrines, mock mysticism, and heretical teachings of the age, until finally her agony reached to such a height that physician and confessor agreed that earthly skill harmed rather than benefited her, and that it was powerless to better her state.

For weeks together she suffered from such violent cramps at the heart, with almost total suffocation, that her death was hourly expected; nevertheless her daily communions gave her strength enough to rally sufficiently to meet each fresh attack. She was now left in peace for a year when a new doctor arrived, with a written recommendation from the Vicar General. Anne Catharine implored that she might be spared new examinations and experiments, but her prayer was not granted, and in silence she resigned herself as ever to God's will and to suffering; receiving at this time many helpful visions upon the subject of magnetism, *clairvoyance*, somnambulism and fortune telling, which was then occupying the public mind and was the cause of the fresh experiments

practised upon herself, and as to the relations which these divers forms of deceit held with the author of all lies and his kingdom of darkness.

A few months after this occurrence, Overberg paid Anne Catharine a visit of a few days, and describes her as being "extremely weak, but overjoyed at seeing him." There was hardly any pulse to be felt, and at times her breathing seemed to cease, whilst her lips and cheeks were of a ghastly white, and her face sunken as that of a dead person. This was before she had received holy Communion of a morning; afterwards, strength and life appeared to return. Overberg's object in coming to Dulmen was to try and persuade Anne Catharine to let herself be separated for a time from all her friends and attendants and removed to Munster, and there undergo another competent examination from disinterested persons, which should put an end for ever to the voices of doubt, incredulity, and suspicion. The poor invalid, however, declared that such a journey was simply impossible for her in her infirm state, besides being an extremely painful idea to herself, and that short of an ecclesiastical command, she must decline to leave her present abode.

A command, however, Overberg dared not give. If she undertook the journey, it must be of her own free will, but so fully did he believe that such a course would be for her essential comfort and peace, that he left no stone unturned to gain her consent. The worthy priest's eloquence gained Wesener over to his side, and he next turned to old Abbé Lambert, who with tears streaming down his aged cheeks, expressed his willingness to go away himself from Dulmen, or make any sacrifice necessary for a strict examination of his poor friend, or leave her for ever, if needs be, rather than put her to such terrible pain. However, Anne Catharine's own consent was not to be

obtained ; she told Overberg frankly that his good intentions on her behalf misled him, and so wisely and eloquently pleaded her own cause, astonishing them all by her firmness and resolution, that they were compelled to yield to her decision and the project fell to the ground.

In the March of the following year, 1817, Anne Catharine had the happiness of seeing her beloved mother once more. The two had met but once since the suppression of the Convent, but when the old woman (she was now eighty years of age) felt the end of her life to be drawing near, she resolved that her death should take place by her sick daughter's bedside. In the month of January, therefore, she had herself transported to Dulmen, where Anne Catharine, who had been a consoling angel and expiatory victim by so many death-beds, had the happiness of tending her own mother in her last moments, and of showing her every service which the filial love of a grateful child's heart could devise.

Bernhard Emmerich had died some few years previously.

CHAPTER XVI.

Clement Brentano.

THREE years passed away after the events narrated in the last chapter, and during these three years Anne Catharine's mental vision was filled with a rich series of manifestations, visions, and pictures, which she was commanded by her angel to make publicly known for the welfare and support of souls.

How to obey this command she knew not, for although she had long been spiritually acquainted with the fact that a person existed who would undertake the task of transcribing the narrations and revelations which she had to make as they fell from her lips, hitherto she had totally failed in meeting with anyone either capable of accomplishing so arduous a work, or with sufficient time at his disposal ; when by a fortuitous circumstance, as it seemed, Clement Brentano came to Dulmen, and in him she beheld the man who was destined to be instrumental in furthering God's glory by the recital of the favours which He was pleased to bestow upon His servant.

Brentano's object in passing through Dulmen at this time was that of meeting his friend Sailer, and paying a visit with him to Count Stolberg, little thinking that his footsteps were to be arrested, and a great part of his future life to be passed in what seemed to him so dull and uninteresting a little town. Whilst at Dulmen he thought he might as well take the opportunity of visiting

its much talked-of ecstasies, and he thus describes in his diary his first interview with Anne Catharine.

“On Thursday, Sept. 24th, 1818, I arrived in Dulmen, and had myself announced to the Emmerich by Wesener, in order not to startle her. In order to reach her little chamber we had to pass through an old, damp, disused cellar. We knocked at the door, which was opened by the sister, and passing through a small kitchen we entered the room where she lies. She greeted me with much friendliness. The candid innocence of her countenance, and the quick, pure tones of her voice, made a most agreeable impression upon me. I failed to find a single trace of exaltation or exaggeration about her. All that she says is short, simple, and to the point, but full of depth, love, and life. I felt at home with her at once, and understood and *felt* the whole atmosphere of her life.”

The reason of Anne Catharine's warm reception of Clement Brentano is easily explained. She saw in him at the first glance the long prayed-for means of fulfilling the commands God had laid upon her, but as for himself he was far from imagining the part he was destined to play, and had in the first few weeks of their intercourse no other thought than that of making her life the subject of a biography more poetical than literal.

First of all we find him describing her in his notes “as a wild flower,” or as “a songster of the woods whose carols grow suddenly more and more mystical until they develope into prophecy.” Then she becomes to him the “mysterious, blessed, loveable, charming, simple, merry, sick unto death, unnaturally-supported, countrified friend.” Soon after she is “the clever, refined, unsophisticated, modest, heavily-tried, powerful, and yet thoroughly peasant soul,” who offers him fresh surprises every moment in her words and dispositions, and then he concludes with

the audacious hope that his presence and influence will, at a single stroke, alter the whole outward state of things.

The sick woman bore the endless caprices and changeable humours of this being, whose nature was so widely different from her own, with inexhaustible patience, and ever met him with the same winning sweetness which she showed to the poorest and humblest of those who gathered around her couch ; at the same time testifying to him a special confidence which deeply touched his heart, prevented him from finding his stay at Dulmen, lengthened by Sailer's delay in joining him, so unendurable as he had anticipated, and fully compensated for the many privations which a residence in a little country town, destitute of all society and amusement or literary circles, naturally occasioned him.

Moreover, whilst he was occupied in listening, as he imagined, to the "prophetical warblings of a wild bird of the woods," that songster was penetrating deeper and deeper into the most secret recesses of his own soul, and preparing the way for his subsequent reconciliation to God, and for the regeneration of his powerful but erring mind by an honest submission to the Church and an open confession of the faith, and by bringing under the yoke of Divine obedience those magnificent gifts and talents which he had hitherto so grievously misused. So unerring was her tact and so well-judged her words that each syllable fell like a seed of corn into his heart—a heart which hitherto had been a dreary waste of schism, atheism, and unsatisfied longing—there to be watered and cherished by her covert teaching and open example, until she was rewarded by a full harvest of rich, ripe grain.

Clement Brentano had had many a struggle with his better self before his final separation from the Church, and even during the period of his greatest spiritual darkness had turned in his own mind despairingly towards the

haven of salvation from the abyss of comfortless doubts and endless confusion into which he had plunged, saying, "Oh! if I had but some great mind which would attach itself to me, and lead me as a blind man into an atmosphere of God-like innocence and piety! for *myself* I cannot trust." So now that he had reached the dreamt-of atmosphere of innocence and devotion, he yielded to its sway—he saw the profound earnestness of the sorrow-laden life of an innocent victim of penance side by side with the humble simplicity of a holy child, in whose person the majesty of the Church and the truth of her doctrine revealed themselves daily more and more clearly to his astonished eyes.

It was not her visions, it was not the charm of the supernatural intimacy in which Anne Catharine lived with God and His holy ones, which made so deep an impression upon the pilgrim,¹ but the aspect of her divine piety and the perception of her perfect life, regulated by the principles of faith, which appeared to him in the light of a faithful mirror of the Church herself, until the deep emotion of his heart found vent a thousand times over in the exclamations: "Now I know what the Church is! Oh! how altogether new the world has become for me! What a thorough Christian the sufferer is indeed!"

The forlornness of Anne Catharine's outward condition was a source of great grief to the pilgrim. A week after his arrival he writes, "the poor thing lives in a state of the greatest discomfort, without any of those womanly attentions she so keenly needs. Her sister is extremely ill tempered and uncouth, and as she is utterly ignorant, the poor invalid has to help her in all household work. Yet she never complains.

"One day I found her surrounded by a mass of wet

¹ The name given to Clement Brentano by Anne Catharine in the history of his life and experiences.

linen, which so weighed down the bedclothes that she could not move. All this damp, steaming linen she had to fold and sort with her wounded hands, until they were blue and stiff with cold. And this is how she often works for days together, and should she fall the while into a happy vision, or make an ecstatic movement, she is roughly shaken and bidden to be quiet by her unnatural sister, as though she were a naughty child.

“The whole life of this pathetic being is rendered an unceasing martyrdom by perpetual physical and mystical sufferings, to which is added the torture of a constant influx of inquisitive importunate visitors. Nevertheless she greets every one cordially, and in all circumstances adores the Divine will, which ordains these trials for her greater humiliation and sanctification. Her miserable bed is as uncomfortably arranged as possible, but she is always cheerful and contented. She who once lived amongst the beauties of nature cannot catch so much as one glimpse of sky, nor even see the tops of the trees from the window of her room, but she never complains, and lies smiling on her couch of pain conversing with the angels and the saints the livelong day.

“One of the most wonderful things about her is the effect of the priestly blessing. If she is in ecstasy, and the consecrated fingers approach, she raises her head and follows them, till when they withdraw she sinks back into her original posture. This is the case with all priests. And oh! how touching is her obedience. When the time comes for her bed to be made, her confessor, by her sister's request, bids her awake (if she is in ecstasy), and at the sound of his voice she quivers, rubs her eyes, and raises herself with an anxious, scared look which goes to my heart. It seems so sad to drag a poor, helpless, suffering creature thus ruthlessly from the bright

happy world in which her spirit is dwelling back to the miseries of her own wretched existence ! ”

The depth of Anne Catharine's humility was often incomprehensible to him, especially with regard to her sister's treatment of her, and many and many were the arguments and persuasions Brentano used to induce her to throw off the additional burden of so clumsy and unkind an attendant, and replace her by a suitable nurse. But no ; Anne Catharine would never hear of giving pain to a fellow-creature, and weeping because she could not accede to his request, she declined to bid Gertrude leave her.

Another day he was again convinced of the effect of the Church's blessing upon her, by happening to be in the room when she was rapt in a vision. Suddenly she began to cough violently without awaking ; he asked if she would drink, but she shook her head and said blessed water she must have, or she should die. He hurried in quest of her confessor, who blessed some fresh water and took it to her, of which she drank willingly and said, “ Now I am refreshed.” Often when he tried to give her some drink which should mitigate her sufferings when consumed with fever, she would smilingly say, “ Ah, why are not you a priest ? ”

More and more circumstances conspired to induce Clement Brentano to tarry on in Dulmen. He felt that here, and here alone he had a home ; that here was a task for him to fulfil, an object for which he must devote his life, a treasure of graces which depended upon himself to gather and employ for the salvation of his own soul and the greater glorification of God. Sailer and Brentano's brother arrived in Dulmen as proposed, and proceeded on their journey without Clement, who promised to join them on their return to Berlin, but when

the time came he could not bring himself to leave the atmosphere of childlike innocence, peace, wisdom, and heavenly truth which he had found in the vicinity of the poor unlettered peasant woman, and return to the cold, delusive, and unsatisfactory life in which he had spent his youth, energies, and talents, for forty long, barren years.

His presence, although desired by Anne Catharine, was in one respect far from being an uninterrupted comfort to her. The arrival of so brilliant a mind into this humble circle, so widely different from that to which the poet and pet of Berlin society had been accustomed, was naturally calculated to produce discord, which discord was fomented by the ardent, fiery and jealous spirit of Brentano, who knew not the meaning of the words patience and self-control, and considered every moment as lost which was not spent by Anne Catharine in their mutual work, namely, the recital of her visions, and who, upon interruptions on the part of sick people who came for help, mourners who came for consolation, and of other claimants of her bounties, would break forth into violent outbursts of anger, and bitter expressions of ill-will, which it required all Anne Catharine's tact and patience to soothe.

According to his way of thinking, the physician ought never to address his patient, beyond enquiring after her health, the confessor never to hold conversations with her on spiritual subjects, Abbé Lambert never to seek sympathy with the ailments of a failing old age, in order that the thread of her relations might never be interrupted, and her ear given to the pilgrim alone.

Anne Catharine's patience was thus often sorely tried, and her strength of spirit tested in restoring a perpetually interrupted peace to these ill-assorted elements of her home; until finally she could think of no other method

of enforcing self-conquest upon Brentano than by persuading him to a temporary separation.

By dint of reiterated entreaties and promises of a hearty welcome on his return, she induced him to leave in the January of 1819, and did not allow him to return until the end of May, when, although four months had elapsed, which he had spent in earnest endeavours to control the selfish impetuosity of his nature, it was still a considerable time before he attained that peace and freedom of spirit requisite for the fulfilment of the great mission marked out for him by Almighty God.

Gladly would Fr. Limberg, Abbé Lambert, and Wesener, have parted for ever from the pilgrim, for now that he had left them awhile in peace, they felt more keenly than ever what discomfort and suffering his presence had caused to all, and what pain and weariness his inconsiderate questionings and pertinacious thirst for knowledge had occasioned the invalid. They knew that a repetition of the same trial was inevitable, and only Anne Catharine's solemn assurance that her earthly task could not be completed without his assistance, succeeded in inducing either of the three to give his consent to his re-entering the house.

Moreover other circumstances had arisen to increase their anxiety by pointing to the possibility of a renewal of the torture of a public examination. Not only was the pilgrim the object of the attention of the whole of Munster, but also on account of the ruthless freedom of his tongue, an object of popular animosity and suspicion. His keen insight into the weaknesses and failings of others, the unmerciful manner in which his biting sarcasm or sense of the ridiculous, laid bare the defects of his neighbours, made him an object of dread to all, whilst, to the staid, humdrum little town of Dulmen his whole person presented so enigmatical and unusual an appear-

ance, that conjecture and gossip were alike rife as to what possible motive could occasion his confidential relations with Anne Catharine, and only his compassion towards the poor, his piety, and the rare simplicity of his way of life, held in check the tongue of scandal.

Therefore it was not quite without reason that Anne Catharine's little band of friends dreaded a fresh interrogation, since through Brentano himself the news had spread throughout Munster, that a change was visible in the stigmata.

When this intelligence and other idle stories reached the ears of the Vicar-General Droste, he had considered it incumbent upon him to pay the invalid a visit in order to make a personal observation of her state. But a short half-hour's conversation with Anne Catharine and the contact with her child-like, unsuspecting candour, sufficed to convince him of the idleness of the reports he had heard, and to reinstate the invalid in the high opinion and veneration he had ever felt for her since his former investigation of her case.

Thus stood matters when the news came of the Pilgrim's intended return. Fr. Limberg declined to give any opinion as to the course to be pursued, whilst the Abbé Lambert and Wesener declared hotly that his readmittance was impossible. Anne Catharine finding it impossible to pacify them, applied to her sole human stay, Overberg, and besought him to make those around her comprehend why and wherefore it was not in her power to forbid Clement Brentano the house. The consequence of his mediation was that when the Pilgrim arrived at Dulmen in the course of May, he received a cordial reception from all, whilst Anne Catharine spared no pains to remove every symptom of ill-will which might lurk in the heart of any of her household, and peace was once more established.

CHAPTER XVII.

Captivity.

AT the beginning of the Church's year of 1818-19, Anne Catharine received Divine warnings of heavy woes and expiatory sufferings in store, to be endured for the welfare of the Church and for the confounding of her enemies, and she was bidden to implore the Holy Ghost to come daily to her aid until the hour of her trial should arrive. Prophetical visions were then vouchsafed to her, by which she saw her future sufferings and the spiritual aid she should receive, until her strength and patience were raised to the point which God deemed sufficient, and the blow came.

On August 2nd a Commission of Inquiry arrived in Dulmen, with the provincial counsellor Bonninghausen at its head. The other members were Drs. Rave, Busch, Pastor Niesert, of Velen; Roseri, Vicar of Leyden; Professors Roling, Borges, and Zumbrinck; and Nagelschmidt, an apothecary. Bonninghausen, accompanied by Roseri, first made his way to Anne Catharine's dwelling, in order to announce to her the commencement of a new inquiry. Anne Catharine declared herself ready to answer, as before, any questions that should be put to her. That, she was told, was not sufficient. She must instantly remove herself to the house of the court lawyer Mersmann.

To this she replied that although her convent was suppressed she was still a nun, and as such could not change

her abode without permission of her superiors. Bonninghausen retorted that this was no ecclesiastical affair, but that as three priests were with him their authority might do. She denied this, and turning to Roseri asked him what he was doing there without leave from the Vicariate, if this was, as he confessed, no ecclesiastical affair; whereupon he murmured some excuse, and the two left the room to concert further measures, since the invalid refused to stir unless under obedience.

Finding no other means available for their designs, this wretched commission (whose numbers had been increased by a protestant doctor), succeeded in so skilfully pleading their cause before the Vicar-General, that he, after giving Roseri a stern reprimand for presuming to act without his permission, was induced to believe that the proposed official enquiry was prompted by the sole desire of establishing Anne Catharine's truth and innocence beyond all possibility of suspicion, and that the only way in which this could be satisfactorily accomplished was by separating her for a time from all her present surroundings, even from her Confessor, and by confiding her during the inquiry to the care of disinterested strangers in a house of unimpeachable respectability where she would be treated with every consideration.

Under these impressions the Vicar-General gave Anne Catharine orders to submit, and thus unwittingly delivered her, bound hand and foot, into the power of her enemies.

She was, accordingly, removed to the house of Councillor Mersmann, and placed in a room on the second floor, which could be entered only by a door out of another small room. Her bed was placed in the centre of this room, and in such a position that it could be watched from the ante-room, where four commissioners received orders to station themselves alternately two by two, and

never on any pretence whatever to lose sight of the sick woman, day or night. The furniture and linen of the chamber were minutely examined by the commissioners lest they should contain any instrument capable of inflicting a wound, or any chemical preparation, whilst the very finger-nails of the invalid were also examined lest they should be sufficiently long to tear the skin.

A woman of the name of Wiltner was appointed as Anne Catharine's attendant by the commission. She had never seen the invalid, and had only heard her described as a cunning impostor, whose deceit she was to aid in laying bare to the light of day.

During the removal, Anne Catharine's senses had mercifully been engrossed in visions, and it was towards the evening of the first day of her captivity that she awoke to the full consciousness of her new position and complete isolation. In order to be prepared against all emergencies she petitioned to be allowed to receive Holy Communion on the following morning, when she offered herself and all that lay before her anew to God and prayed for her tormentors, and after this, felt herself so invigorated and strengthened that she was able to look forward to her coming trial with complete peace of soul and entire resignation to God's most Holy Will. This was on Sunday, the 8th August, which day passed over quietly, and she was treated with courtesy by those appointed to watch her.

On the Monday night she was much disturbed by her watchers thrusting a light into her face several times, waking her suddenly, and putting various questions to her; then, however, her good angel stood visibly by her and instructed her in the replies she should give.

On the Tuesday morning, the judicial examination was begun by Dr. Rave, whose unsparing, rough, inconsiderate questionings had already caused Anne Catharine so

much pain. So now again she had to go through a merciless investigation of her wounds, whilst Borges and Bonninghausen seated themselves at the foot of the bed.

Her weakness was such that every word was a painful effort, but still she struggled on, answering every query with clearness and precision, hoping thus to prove her own truth and innocence, the whole day long, until as evening fairly closed in she sank fainting upon her pillows.

Rave and Bonninghausen had, throughout the day, striven to make her believe that their intentions were friendly in the extreme towards her, and each clothed his words with a fairish semblance of politeness. The sneering, cynical Borges, however, was from the first a fearful torment to her; she recognized him as the origin of the whole of this irregular proceeding, whilst he never lost an opportunity of wounding her feelings by the insulting impudence of his words and actions. On the evening of this day, she was informed that admittance would be denied to all her former friends, and that Rensing would bring her holy Communion once a-week. During the night she was disturbed in the same manner as on the preceding, with the addition that this time the wounds in her hands were perpetually felt and examined by her visitants.

On Thursday the 10th the examination began again early in the morning, and the same old ground was again gone over, this time before all the members of the commission, when the martyred body of the sufferer was treated as though it had been a block of wood, and, did the poor thing, with trembling hand endeavour to cover her breast, the cloth was brutally torn from her grasp, and her pitiful prayers to be spared such indignities greeted with sneers and cynical laughter. "This day," she confessed later, "was the bitterest in my life. I was quite crushed to the

earth with shame and grief over what I had to endure, and the words I was forced to hear."

On Wednesday 11th the commissioners changed their tactics; the actual existence of the wounds could no longer be denied, and they therefore determined to bring Anne Catharine, by artifice, to confess that they had been artistically produced by the emigrant French priest. It was Rave who undertook to force this avowal from the invalid, and the righteous indignation with which such a charge was repudiated by Anne Catharine may be imagined.

The following day she experienced new torments at the hands of Busch, a rough, unscrupulous medical student, whose insolent arrogance she sought at first to overawe by severe silent gravity; finding this of no avail, she addressed him in a few burning words of warning, bidding him not to attempt to meddle with things before which older men had confessed themselves powerless. He was touched for the moment, but the good impression soon passed away, and he became, if possible, rougher and more insolently unscrupulous than the older men.

On the first Friday of her imprisonment expectation was at its height, and as by mid-day a few signs of bleeding were to be seen in the wounds of the head, Busch began his experiments in presence of the whole commission. First of all he washed the forehead with warm, then with cold water, after this with vinegar, and finally rubbed it with vitriolated-naptha; this washing and rubbing lasted the whole afternoon, until Anne Catharine was senseless from the agony of the pain. The nurse was then called into council, upon whom the meek, angelic behaviour of the poor tortured nun had long since made so deep an impression, that she boldly told the assemblage that they were a parcel of traitors and calumniators, and that she

bitterly rued the day when she had consented to be their accomplice.

Three more weary weeks passed which were but a repetition of the one we have described, save that fresh doctors were called in to join the commission, fresh rubbings and washings were daily inflicted upon the quivering body, fresh insults were daily offered to the patient sufferer, and questionings and cross-questionings were exhausted and re-exhausted, until finally the patience of the tormented baffled and conquered that of her tormentors.

Bonninghausen, the ostensible head of the commission, became daily more and more irate with the whole affair, and longed to see it ended, no matter with what result. Borges withdrew in disgust, because the sick woman could not be convicted of imposture ; Rave beheld his own cunning shattered against Anne Catharine's simplicity and uprightness ; Nagelschmidt and Zumbrink declared themselves in favour of the patient's innocence ; the others were shaken in their minds, and nothing had been discovered which could justify or give the slightest grounds for the course of ill-usage and illegal persecution to which a defenceless Religious had been submitted.

The result of it all was that on Sunday Anne Catharine was conveyed back to her own dwelling, secretly as she had been taken thence, during the High Mass, whilst nearly all the population of Dulmen were in church praying heartily for her safe deliverance from captivity.

She had returned, but not to rest. Freed for the time being from her earthly persecutors, spiritual conflicts awaited her, which lasted until the end of the Church's year. She said herself : " I can see no end to my sufferings ; they grow and grow like a tree which spreads its branches over my whole life, and on which, wherever one bough is lopped off, new shoots burst forth."

As Christmas drew near her physical sufferings increased, and the pains in her wounds redoubled in intensity—pains which she welcomed joyfully as “so many flowers wherewith to decorate the Crib at Bethlehem.” Whilst her limbs were contracted with anguish, her countenance beamed with joy as she related to the Pilgrim the beautiful and heavenly visions which were shown her of the Mother of God and her Divine Infant.

As Christmas passed away these peaceful, consoling pictures gave place to heartrending scenes of Our Lord’s Passion, which she followed in every detail, suffering as He suffered, her helpless body clothing itself, as it were, with the anguish her mental vision was beholding. The thorny crown pressed heavily into her head, her whole body appeared as though scourged and bruised, round her wrists, neck, and waist were heavy indentations as of tightly-bound cords, whilst from her frame exuded a cold, clammy perspiration. Suddenly one day she extended her arms in the form of a cross with such violence that it seemed as though they were being dislocated. As they again fell to her sides, the impossibility of laying down her thorn-pierced head continued, and it fell forwards upon her breast, whilst all her limbs assumed the rigidity and motionlessness of death.

When she had recovered herself she explained that she was suffering with her Divine Spouse, that she was scourged, crowned with thorns, bound and nailed to the cross with Him, whilst at the same time she was consoled by seeing several souls who had long fallen into complete oblivion delivered by her suffering and raised into heaven.

Vision now succeeded vision, as her angel conducted her in spirit to every part of the universe, wherever expiation on behalf of the Church, satisfaction for sin, or spiritual alms were required of her. During the whole

of this time the sweet, childlike simplicity of her heroic and favoured soul was singularly manifested by the fact that, whilst undergoing extraordinary sufferings, and receiving inundations of Divine knowledge, her fingers never ceased from their wonted labour of love, namely, making clothing for sick people and children.

Day and night, when racked with pain, whether in an ecstatic state or not, her hands were ever busy, and in no circumstance did the complete unconsciousness of self and quiet gaiety of heart which distinguished her display themselves more winningly, than in the touching glee which shone in her face and voice when she beheld before her a goodly pile of little caps, socks, wrappers, and such-like baby garments. Sometimes she would fall asleep with her bed covered with these things, and on awaking find that they had all been carefully arranged in her drawers, although no human being had entered her room. In this kind of work St. Lidwina was often her companion and assistant, whose life her own so closely resembled. Sometimes, too, Anne Catharine was rewarded by beholding in her visions the little ones whom her gifts had clothed and warmed, playing together with the Child Jesus in their midst, Who looked gratefully towards her, and thanked her in the children's name.

There was now no part of the world whither her angel did not mystically lead Anne Catharine, in order to fulfil her mission of expiating God's offended Majesty, and rescuing souls from the brink of hell. There was no corner of the earth, no member of the Church's Body excluded from the blessing of her sufferings and works of love.

In Rome she was as much at home as in the Holy Land, and she knew the Vatican and the different churches and sanctuaries of the Eternal City as inti-

mately as the Cenaculum, Temple, and other holy places in and about Jerusalem. On her journeys she was accompanied and aided by the souls of those saints and martyrs whose bodies rested at her feet, whilst from them she learnt the history of their past lives down to the minutest particulars. It would take volumes were we to describe the beautiful visions she had of all these holy ones, and the sweet intercourse she held with the saints in the heavenly Jerusalem, whither, after fearful mystical sufferings of atonement, she was rapt in spirit, there to gain new life and vigour in drinking at those divine fountains of light and love, where she learnt, as it seemed to her, from their own lips, the life on earth of each saint, the history of his or her trials, and received at their hands the heavenly weapons with which they had fought and conquered in the fight.

The true mission of her life, as has been frequently said, was to suffer for the Church and the signification of the agonizing pains she felt in her limbs was once explained to her by the following allegory. She beheld a gigantic body, which reached to the sky, in a terrible state of mutilation ; the hands and feet were cut off, and the body itself covered with large wounds ; some of these wounds were fresh and bleeding, others filled with proud ulcerated flesh, and surrounded by lumpy excrescences. One side of the body was quite black, and as it were eaten away. Her angel told her that this represented the Body of the Church, and of all men, and pointing to each wound he showed a different part of the world, and she beheld men and nations separated from the Church, and felt in her own frame the anguish which the forcible rending of member from limb occasions to the human body. Each wound had its separate meaning, which she was given to feel, and then bidden to set promptly about

her mystical work of binding, cutting, healing, and cleansing, whilst saints and holy spirits directed her hands from above, and the twelve Apostles looked on in approval.

Often she grew faint and weary over her arduous work, and besought her guide to allow her to cease, but he only bade her be of greater courage, and grasp the cross more firmly, admitting her now and then to glimpses of the heavenly Jerusalem, wherewith to refresh her wearied, thirsting soul. This celestial city was sometimes shown to her as upon the summit of a mountain, the sides of which she was climbing, and often and often she would fancy she had reached it, when a new obstacle presented itself, an unseen gorge intervened, down which she had to descend on some errand of mercy in the plain below, again to rise by steep, narrow paths, dragging with her fresh weights, in the shape of paralytic, lame, or perhaps unwilling pilgrims, who were too weak to go alone.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Last Years and Death.

THE year 1820 opened with fresh sufferings for Anne Catharine. In the month of February she lost her kind old friend, Abbé Lambert, and at the same time received an intimation from Clement Brentano's brother that a new dwelling had been procured for her, where she would be safe from intrusion—the truth being that Brentano's jealousy of the smallest interruption to the recital of her

visions, had risen to such an height, that the presence of Anne Catharine's few friends had become an intolerable burthen to him, which burthen he had determined to remove.

His behaviour to Anne Catharine herself was now unfeeling in the extreme, for in the excitement of transcribing the narratives as they fell from her lips, he knew no mercy or consideration for her sufferings. When spasms of pain contracted her limbs, when violent fits of coughing attacked her, accompanied by copious spitting of blood, which rendered articulation next to impossible, and the tears streamed down her cheeks, her bitterest enemy could not have treated her with greater rigour than did Brentano. Question followed question; bitter reproaches and complaints greeted every symptom of pain the sufferer displayed, whilst he fell upon her every word as a prey, of which he openly said he dreaded that death should rob him, putting her poor agonizing body entirely out of the question.

In spite of her perfect patience and submission, the poor invalid would sometimes long for death to come and free her from her tormentor, whose very faults recoiled upon himself by the additional attacks of illness which she took upon herself in expiation for his impatience, but she had a great task to fulfil, and was told that strength should be given her until it was ended, and that was the narrative of the Life of Jesus Christ upon earth, which took up a period of about seven years; and therefore she bore her sorrows calmly on, as she had borne those of her lifelong, waiting patiently till God, in His own good time, should see fit to release her from the weary burden of her life.

Whilst Anne Catharine was hesitating, in the goodness of her heart, whether she should obey Brentano's arbitrary plans on her behalf, or accept an offer of a home

which was made to her, on the news of the Abbé Lambert's death, by a noble family to whom she was personally known and beloved, a carriage drew up one evening before the door of her apartment, in which Clement told her she was to be removed to the dwelling he and his brother had hired. Great was the dismay of those with the sick woman, who all considered that a shameful advantage was being taken of the poor sufferer's helplessness, and who all entirely declined to co-operate in her removal.

However, finally, Brentano had his way, and in the night of the 7th August Anne Catharine, senseless and unconscious, was once more conveyed across the little town to a dark, gloomy little apartment on a ground floor, almost as much a prisoner as when carried by force some years before to her three weeks' captivity in the house of Counsellor Mersmann.

Senseless, and to all outward appearance lifeless as she was, on passing before the door of the parish church, she raised herself and bowed down in lowly reverence before the most Blessed Sacrament.

And now, even when Clement's every wish seemed to be fulfilled, he broke out afresh into unreasonable complaints against her increasing illnesses, and the impossibility of enforcing her total seclusion. And so it continued until her death! Hard heartedness and reproof from those who should have shown her most sympathy and compassion; intervals of rest, interspersed between public insult or private interference, and sickness succeeding sickness, amidst which the hardness of her task in relating the "Life of Jesus Christ," with Clement transcribing by her bedside, may be more easily imagined than described.

In these sicknesses she had every symptom of consumption, profuse perspiration, severe cough, high fever,

and expectoration of blood, accompanied by acute pains in the pit of the stomach, which were supposed to be gout, and by cramp in the intestines, to which was added unvarying pain from the stigmata, whence blood flowed copiously at frequent intervals. Her body became so attenuated that every bone could be counted beneath the skin, and in many places grievous wounds were occasioned, which prevented the poor skeleton-like frame from finding ease in any posture whatever. Amid such sufferings her tranquillity of soul grew and increased day by day until the end, and she derived new strength to endure each time that the Blessed Sacrament was brought to her.

Occasionally she was given relief by the application of some consecrated oil to the parts affected, but whatever agonies she might endure, her patience equalled her pain. If an involuntary moan were wrung from her lips, it was instantaneously succeeded by expressions of love towards God, and by exclamations of how happy she was in suffering, and then she would pray for others who suffered yet more than herself. Sometimes in the midst of the terrible anguish, which even ecstasies did not appear to interrupt, she would lift herself up upon her bed, and render fervent acts of thanksgiving to God, and one day, turning to those by her side, she rapturously exclaimed, "Oh ! how good God is ! How marvellously he has sustained me ; sometimes He sends me a holy martyr ; sometimes a saint ; who bring me sweet flowers or fragrant herbs, which calm my pain or infuse new strength into me for fresh sufferings. I see these divine medicines so distinctly, that I am often half fearful that my confessor may upset some of the precious vases which cover my bed."

The year 1823 brought her an increase of all the spiritual labours of her former years. She was bidden to

make up the Church's accounts, and atone in her own person for all the negligences of the Church militant, and gather together the numerous graces which Christ had deposited for the requirements of each individual, and for the expiation of each sin, and which had been carelessly neglected or trodden under foot. Her Lord now demanded a strict account from His Church of these treasures, the misuse of which Anne Catharine saw would be visited by heavy affliction and temporal punishment.

Her task was, therefore, as it ever had been, to cast herself between the uplifted arm of God's offended majesty and His offending creatures, and offer herself, her prayers, sighs, groans, and anguish, as a holocaust which should suffer the punishment which the guilt of others had deserved. Days and nights she spent in supplicating her Lord's mercy, who at first appeared deaf to her cries, and rebuffed her. Still she persevered until her prayer, in its agony of fervour on behalf of her beloved Mother the Church, seemed to grow into a bold, yet humble dispute with God, and then at last her sacrifice was accepted.

With the beginning of Advent these heavy sorrows were in some degree soothed by peaceful visions, resembling those of her childhood, of the Blessed Virgin's journey to Bethlehem, and her preparations for the birth of her Divine Son. This season of the Church's year had always been one of sweet consolation to Anne Catharine, and she had usually forgotten all care in the delight of accompanying Our Lady and St. Joseph step by step as they went along, but this time she had fewer consolations and more fatigue.

Thus at the hour of Our Saviour's birth, a moment which generally had been one of almost intoxicating joy to her, her weary spirit dragged itself painfully to the side of the Blessed Infant in the manger, and had no

other present to bring Him but myrrh, no offering save His cross, under the weight of which she fell as though dying, at His feet. It seemed to her as though she were brought there to render up her last earthly account to God, and that she was thus offering herself in sacrifice for the last time for a multitude of physical and mental sufferers.

When she returned to the actual world, she was heard to murmur gently to herself, smiling as she did so : "The Child Jesus has brought me nothing this year but a cross and instruments of torture."

As day now followed day she concentrated herself more and more in her sufferings, and spoke at rare intervals ; the few words she let fall now and then, betokening that her mind was still following her Lord through the course of His earthly life.

With the new year she grew visibly worse, and about the 15th January she said : "The Child Jesus brought me great pain this Christmas, but He came again last night with a fresh load. I was once more beside His crib at Bethlehem ; He was very feverish, and showed me His sufferings and those of His mother ; they were all so poor that their only food was a small piece of stale bread. He then sent me fresh pains, saying : 'Thou art Mine ; thou art My betrothed ; suffer as I have suffered, and ask not the reason why !' I do not know what this new suffering will be, nor whether it will last long. I offer myself willingly to my martyrdom ; whether I live or whether I die I desire that the hidden will of God be accomplished within me. As for the rest, I have many a consolation amidst my pains. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

Week after week passed, and Anne Catharine's long agony continued ; her sufferings continued to increase, if increase could be possible in so pitiable a state : propped

up in her bed, she would sway from side to side in her anguish, stifled groans escaping her blanched lips: did anyone attempt to lay her down, she was threatened with immediate suffocation; her breathing was laboured, whilst every muscle and nerve quivered and contracted with pain. Violent retchings racked her frame, her throat was swollen and burning, her mouth parched, her cheeks hectic with fever, her pulse throbbing at the rate of 180 a minute, and the marks of the sacred stigmata glistening like silver beneath the distended skin.

On the 27th January it was deemed necessary to administer Extreme Unction, which she received with deep gratitude and full consciousness. After this she grew somewhat calmer, and the following morning was able to receive Holy Communion with her accustomed fervour of devotion.

February arrived, and Anne Catharine still lingered; she lay now to outward appearances in a state of semi-consciousness, save when some fresh paroxysm of pain would draw from her a faintly uttered expression of thankfulness, such as "Ah! Lord Jesus, I thank thee a thousand, thousand times," or, "My Jesus, I live and die for Thee alone." Once, when her friends were striving to give her ease by changing the position of her pillows, she begged them not to move her, saying, "I am upon the Cross; leave me alone; it will soon be over."

Although she had received the last Sacraments, she was still anxious about a fault committed in her childhood, and Fr. Limberg therefore gave her a general absolution, and recited the prayers for the dying; at this moment her sister Gertrude came forward and besought her much injured sister's forgiveness, when Anne Catharine looked at her with a blank stare of astonishment, saying, with grave earnestness, "There is not a creature upon this earth whom I have not forgiven."

After this she took an affectionate farewell of her Confessor and relapsed into silence, whispering occasionally, "Come soon, oh! come Lord Jesus!" whilst her breathing grew shorter and more laboured, and a look of heavenly peace and solemnity settled upon her face.

As she lay thus, some of her friends who were watching in the ante-room, fancying that she could no longer hear their voices, began to speak of her wonderful patience and other virtues, when the dying woman moved uneasily upon her pillows, and exclaimed, "Oh! for the love of God, do not praise me; you know not that for every word you say I am detained longer here! I cannot die whilst so many good people think well of me, miserable sinner that I am. Ah! would that I could cry out in the streets what an unworthy wretch I am! Ah! Lord Jesus, tell them that I am far below the good thief on the cross, who never had the graces I have received! I must pay for these praises by uniting new sufferings with those of Jesus. Ah! Lord, here they are coming, for I see new flowers falling upon me!" (Flowers had always been the precursors of suffering with her.)

About six o'clock in the evening the Pilgrim entered the room, and together with Gertrude and a few other friends knelt in prayer by her bedside, waiting for the end. Graver and more serene grew Anne Catharine's countenance as she lay propped up on her little wicker bedstead, her eyes riveted upon a crucifix, which Dr. Limberg held before her. Then one of the thin, wan hands was slowly withdrawn from under the coverlid, as though seeking something, when the priest placed a lighted taper in her hand and gave her the crucifix to kiss. Faithful to her deep humility, upon the feet alone did she press her lips.

Again she was heard to speak: "Now I am so peaceful," she murmured, "I feel a confidence as though I had

never committed a sin!" She kissed the crucifix once again, most lovingly, gently sighing, "Oh! help me, help me, Lord Jesus," sank slowly upon her left side, bowed her head upon her breast, and the pure beautiful soul left this sorrow-laden, sin-stained world, to join (as we may venture to believe) that blessed company of virgins who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.

This was at about eight o'clock in the evening of February 9th, 1824.

When the little bell used by the Religious of Anne Catharine's Convent to proclaim the decease of one of their number was rung by Fr. Limberg, Clement Brentano rose from his knees and approached the bedside. For the last time he took in his own the hand of his faithful, long-suffering friend, that marvellous right hand marked with the sign of the world's redemption, upon which the Giver of all good things had bestowed the unparalleled favour of recognizing all that was holy and all that which the Church had blessed. It was quite cold, quite lifeless, that instrument of helpfulness and mercy and charity, which had fed so many hungry, and clothed so many naked. A mighty channel of grace had been withdrawn from the earth, a living suffering witness to God's mighty power.

The dead face was sublime in its calm majestic repose; every line and feature bore the impress of Anne Catharine's deep love of her crucified Lord, and touchingly portrayed the spirit of patience, resignation, and self-sacrifice, which had been her's in life and in death. As Brentano beautifully expressed it, "she looked as though she had died for the love of Jesus Christ in the act of performing some work of mercy for souls."

Fr. Limberg and Dr. Wesener faithfully fulfilled Anne Catharine's dying charge, that her body should be buried untouched, so that in death at least she might be spared

the exposure which had been her torture when living. On Friday the 13th she was borne to her grave, followed by the entire population of Dulmen.

About six or seven weeks after her death, a rumour having got afloat that the body had been secretly withdrawn from its tomb, the coffin was ordered to be privately opened in the presence of seven witnesses, when with a surprise mingled with joy, the latter beheld the sweet serene countenance of the saintly nun upturned to their gaze, unchanged as when she breathed forth her last sigh, save that it had grown far more beautiful than at the moment of death. All traces of care and suffering were smoothed away, and a faint rosy colour tinged the cheeks and the marks of the sacred wounds; the whole expression was that of a person smiling in the midst of a peaceful, happy dream. Upon the coffin was now placed a little plate, containing her name and the date of her death, and then the grave was re-blessed, and all that remained upon earth of the God-favoured, gifted peasant girl, was lowered into a humble nook of the parish churchyard, and the spot marked by the usual simple cross, a rose bush, and a few other flowers, planted by some loving hand.

Before closing this life of Anne Catharine Emmerich, a few words remain to be said on the subject of her works, by which term we mean those visions and meditations which were transcribed at her bedside by Clement Brentano, and which have already been laid before the public in German, French, or English.

These consist of "The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ on Earth," of which the well known "Dolorous Passion" is the conclusion; the "Life of the Blessed Virgin," and a number of more or less fragmentary narratives concerning the Church in each succeeding era, the holy angels,

saints, and stigmatized persons, especially Sts. Agnes, Paula, Agatha, Dorothea, Mary Magdalen of Pazzi, Benedict, Scholastica, Walburga, Thomas of Aquino, Augustine, Francis de Sales, Jane de Chantal, and many martyrs. Anne Catharine herself attached no historical value to these narrations,—she simply related that which had been shown to her, in obedience to distinct commands laid upon her by her angel at different periods of her life. Speaking one day, when in ecstasy, upon the subject, she said :—

“ I know that I should have died many years ago, if it had not been necessary for me to relate all that God had in His mercy shown me touching the Old and New Testaments and the lives of the Saints, for the benefit of others. When I come to the last word of the Life of our Lord, I shall be released from this weary body. Also, so soon as the pilgrim shall have put all which he has written in order, he will die too.¹ One night when I was grieving because I saw so many things which I was too ignorant to comprehend, my Betrothed said to me that these visions were not given to me for myself, but they were sent that I might have them written down and distributed to all the world. That now was not the time for exterior miracles, and that He gave these visions in order to show that He will be with His Church to the end of all ages. He told me, too, that no matter how I suffered, no matter if I were even jeered and mocked at, I must tell all that I beheld, that this was not my affair, but that of the Church.”

Anne Catharine generally gave her narratives in her native dialect, Westphalian. Whilst she spoke Brentano noted down the principal points upon paper, completing his task afterwards from memory, and then he brought the transcription to Anne Catharine to be revised, corrected,

¹ This prophecy was literally fulfilled.

and completed according to her directions, cancelling every syllable which she did not recognize as in perfect accordance with her own visions.

An objection has been urged by some persons in later years against the veracity of Brentano's edition of these recitals, on the score that as he was a poet, the temptation to add something of his own elegance of language and rich imaginary genius might have induced him to give to the simple narrations of the lowly-born Religious a gloss and fulness of detail which were not their own. To this we can but reply, in the words of Mons. de Cazalés, in his preface to the translation of the Dolorous Passion, that "a sufficient guarantee of Clement Brentano's good faith is offered by the facts of his devoting his life to a task which he held as sacred, for which he prepared himself by various exercises of piety, and in which he steadily persevered for years, entirely retired from the world, in spite of the railleries which his voluntary assumption of the post of secretary to a 'poor visionary,' earned for him in those brilliant literary circles where he had hitherto met with naught but homage and adulation."

After Brentano's death his own works were published by his surviving relatives. They plainly testify to what a height of literary renown he might have climbed had he not voluntarily renounced his title to fame by consecrating his last years to arranging and publishing these notes written by the bedside of the suffering ecstatic. This complete disinterestedness with regard to his own reputation is, it appears to us, as clear a testimony in favour of his sincerity as could be desired.

Other proofs may be found in the frequent blanks, obscure passages, repetitions, and even contradictions which we sometimes encounter in Anne Catharine's narrations, and which are sufficiently accounted for by the cruel sufferings and incessant interruptions which inter-

mitted these confidences, and by the difficulty she often experienced in clothing in ordinary language that which had been shown her under the "light of ecstasy," together with her oft-felt perplexity as to whether her words were thoroughly understood by the faithful transcriber.

That she herself was satisfied with Clement's work is plainly proved by the fact that one day, after lamenting that so many precious revelations of various saints who had been shown visions very similar to her own—especially those of St. Hildegarde, St. Frances of Rome, St. Veronica Giuliani, and the Venerable Mary of Jesus—had been either partially lost or else distorted and changed by the carelessness and incapacity of those to whom the charge of publishing their writings had been left, Brentano happened to hold before her eyes as she lay apparently unconscious (the room was badly lit at the time) a page of his manuscript, when she eagerly exclaimed: "That paper is covered with shining characters. They have been written by the man whom I saw last night seated writing near that other person whose heart is torn and wounded, and who was telling him many things. The letters are bright and radiant with light. The Pilgrim has not done it, but it is the grace of God! Oh! I cannot explain how it is. No one else could write as he does." The fact of the letters appearing to Anne Catharine as bright and shining was doubtless owing to the same gift by which she discerned relics and other holy things by a light hovering over or round them, as was sometimes the case with her own stigmata.

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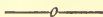
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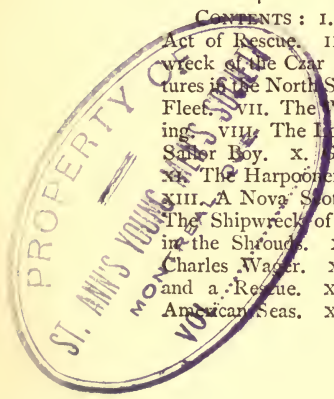
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